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The Art of the Possible: Framing Self-Government in Scotland and Flanders

Coree Brown Swan

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Declaration

I, Coree Brown Swan, herewith declare that this thesis was written by me, that the work is my own work, and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Acknowledgements

This project has been both the most challenging and rewarding process I've undertaken, and would not have been possible without the support I've received, both professional, and personal, along the way.

Firstly, my mom and dad, who have always been supportive of my endeavours, even when they take me far, far from home.

I've always said I won the supervisor lottery with Professor Nicola McEwen and Dr Wilfried Swenden and I thank them both for their feedback, patience, and enthusiasm for my project. Nicola's mentorship and support has been invaluable as I navigate the strange world of academia.

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Abstract

Sub-state nationalist parties mobilised and saw an increase in electoral support in the 1960s and 1970s. A heterogeneous group of parties, they are united by their claims upon the state in favour of self-government. However, sub-state nationalist parties advance a variety of goals, ranging from more moderate forms of recognition and cultural or political autonomy, to more radical restructuring of the state along federal lines, to even more radical demands for political independence. The language, content, and arguments in favour of these goals varies – both between parties and within individual parties' over time. As a result, we know less than we should about self-government goals themselves.

This research asks two core questions. Firstly, what do sub-state nationalist parties want? And more importantly, operating from the assumption that sub-state nationalist parties are strategic actors, how do their goals reflect strategic considerations, understanding of the contexts in which they are expressed, and their historical positions? By comparing three cases, a third question can be explored, assessing the ways in which variation in the empirical contexts in which these goals are articulated may manifest in variation in the framing of self-government goals.

In this research, I argue the self-government goal presented by a given sub-state nationalist party can be considered a reflection of the '*art of the possible*', a pragmatic articulation of what might be achieved under a system of constraints rather than the single-minded pursuit of self-government, regardless of its costs and consequences.

In order to fully capture the complexity of self-government goals and the contexts in which they are expressed, three case studies, in two territorial contexts, are studied in depth. The first is the Scottish National Party, which seeks political independence for Scotland. The other two are parties which emerged in Flanders, the Volksunie, which existed between 1954 and 2001, and its successor, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. These cases represent some of the most successful sub-state nationalist parties, both in electoral terms, particularly in recent years, and arguably in making progress towards their self-government goals.

Lay Summary

Sub-state nationalist parties are those which claim to represent a community or nation, mobilise in a defined territory, and seek self-government on behalf of that nation and territory. These parties have seen an increase in electoral support in the 1960s and 1970s and remain relevant as events in Quebec, Scotland, Flanders, Catalonia, and the Basque Country have shown.

Sub-state nationalist parties advance a variety of goals – ranging from representation and accommodation within the existing state to far-reaching state reform along a federalist or confederalist model to exit from that state, in the form of independence. This research aims to examine these goals in detail and seeks to understand how these goals are shaped by the context in which they are articulated.

It does so with reference to three parties, all situated on the more radical end of the spectrum – the Scottish National Party of Scotland, the Volksunie and its successor, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. The goals of each party are analysed from their origins through to 2014. The way in which parties engage with the international and European dimension, the British and Belgian states, and electoral competition and the party system when articulating their self-government goals are explored.

This research concludes that parties express a self-government goal which reflects the 'art of the possible', the principle of self-government shaped and moulded by a strategic consideration of what might realistically be achieved

Introduction

2014 represented a pivotal, albeit ultimately anticlimactic, year for sub-state nationalist parties throughout Europe. Notable events included a referendum on independence in Scotland and the '*mother of all elections*' in Belgium. Although beyond the remit of this thesis, an informal vote on self-determination also took place in Catalonia. These events drew massive media attention and triggered a broadening discussion of sub-state nationalism and self-government in the twenty-first century – ideas which had been bubbling beneath the surface for years but had not yet come to such a head.

In advance of 2014, both the SNP and the N-VA spoke openly self-government. The level of detail, form, and content of these self-government goals were articulated in an interesting fashion which merited further exploration. The SNP spoke of independence but also integration, within the European Union and with the rest of the United Kingdom. The N-VA had, in the short-term, downplayed the prospect of independence, which remained in the party's statutes, in favour of an ambiguously defined confederalism, emphasising European and Flemish structures. The visions of each party raised broader questions about the meaning of self-government in the twenty-first century.

The implications of the two events have been far-reaching, including the entry into federal government by the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie after achieving an unprecedented level of support, the Scottish National Party's remarkable success in the 2015 General Election and continued constitutional debates over Scotland's place within the Union, and the UK's place within Europe..

My interest in sub-state nationalism began much earlier and largely by chance. In 2006, I was on a language immersion programme in Pepinster, a small village in Wallonia. I was living with a host family and was preparing for a weekend trip to Bruges. My host family warned me that I shouldn't be practicing my French, instead I should speak English in Bruges in order to be treated politely. Thankful for the respite from all French, all the time, I heeded their advice but was intrigued by the notion that such a small country could be so intensely divided.

I had largely forgotten about the issue until later that year, this time in Poland, undertaking a masters in European Studies. I was grappling about for a dissertation topic and in a

moment of procrastination, happened to check the BBC where one of the stories was about *Bye Bye Belgium*, a 2006 mockumentary produced by the Francophone public broadcaster, RTBF and aired on Francophone television (BBC, 2006). The mockumentary, which explored the premise of a unilateral declaration of independence by the Flemish Parliament, with the flight of the king and roadblocks at the border, was notable for its form but also its reception, with viewers believing it to be true. This state of affairs provided the inspiration for my MA dissertation, much to the chagrin of my supervisor, who thought until that point I was writing about Communist-era monuments and national identity.

The issue of Flanders and sub-state nationalism was cast aside for several years as I immersed myself in a world of corporate responsibility and sustainable investment and only returned to my attention in 2010, when I began to consider returning to academia. In Belgium, the June 2010 elections had failed to result in a government, with the breakthrough of the N-VA, a party which was on the verge of extinction just a few years earlier, and another protracted period of government formation had begun. The 2011 Holyrood elections, which saw the SNP win the most seats, made it clear that sub-state nationalism was not going away – indeed, if anything it was perhaps gaining more momentum – and I knew this was something I needed to explore.

This period was both the best and, perhaps, the worst time to be researching these issues – the best because of the level of engagement and interest, and the opportunities to study events in real time, the worst because there was so much going on. Ultimately, the time frame of this research comes to a close in September 2014, a decision which reflects the end of a distinctive period for the parties of interest, but also a pragmatic decision about scope. Throughout my studies, I had the privilege to engage with events as they unfolded, firstly, through my role with the Future of the UK and Scotland project, and later, through the Centre on Constitutional Change.

The rise and rise of sub-state nationalism

Sub-state nationalism, in the form of political competition, has become increasingly salient in Western democracies, with the electoral breakthrough of sub-state nationalist parties in the 1960s and 1970s (De Winter, 1998; Keating, 1988; Rudolph & Thompson, 1989). This phenomenon appears to be both old, proclaiming an attachment to an older

state or identity, and new, advocating for new forms of government to reflect distinctive needs and identity. This challenged traditional narratives of modernisation and national integration (Keating, 2008).

Sub-state nationalist parties have been defined and labelled differently but in this research, they are understood to have four key characteristics: (1) the claim to represent a specific community or nation; (2) the mobilisation of the party in a specific territory; (3) the pursuit of a preferred constitutional or territorial outcome; and (4) the pursuit of these goals through democratic means.

Although they vary in both the ways in which they manifest, they are understood to share a common goal, each making a '*demand for political reorganisation of the existing national power structure*' for some sort of self-government (De Winter, 1998: 204). The content of this goal varies, both across the universe of cases and over time (as discussed below) but all '*make a claim upon the state*' (Urwin, 1982: 232).

These parties have had varying levels of electoral success, but have been successful, when combined with other forces, in triggering some response by the central state, with states largely becoming more decentralised, as documented by Hooghe and Marks (2001). This expanded the options and resources available to sub-state nationalist parties, providing a political opportunity structure in which they could mobilise or pursue entry into government, a direct means of pursuing self-government goals (Bolleyer, 2009; Deschouwer, 2003; Elias & Tronconi, 2011; Hepburn, 2013).

Rather than being overtaken by international developments, sub-state nationalism appears increasingly relevant in the twenty-first century as parties and people attempt to orient themselves in a globalising world and new forms of territorial organisation emerge. This dissertation represents an effort to understand these self-government goals.

The puzzle of self-government goals

Sub-state nationalist parties, by their nature, '*demand for political reorganisation of the existing national power structure*' or '*some kind of self-government*' for their territory (De Winter, 1998: 204). However, the classification of these parties and their self-government goals is often hindered by context,language, strategy, and variation within parties and over time.

The labelling of goals reflects the nuances of the particular cultural, linguistic, and political context in which it is expressed. We see variation amongst parties, with those making claims to constitutional models of federalism, confederalism, and political independence, while others speak of more abstract and ideational principles of freedom, liberty, and self-rule. (Keating & Gagnon, 2012).

Goals may also be subject to strategic manoeuvre – with parties pursuing short-term and long-term goals simultaneously, with no clear delineation between these goals (Toubeau 2011: 432). Meadwell (2009) illustrates the importance of timing, citing a Breton nationalist who argued *'[I]t is a question of catching the right instant. Too early you break your neck. Too late you lose your time*'. This suggests a strategic component, present in both the means by which goals are to be pursued and the content of the goals themselves.

Variation is present between parties which fall under the header of sub-state nationalist parties. But internal variation – both within parties at a single point in time and across time is also important. Although unified by a demand for self-government, there may be divides within a single party over what self-government might look like, intermediate steps versus the ultimate goal, and its strategic pursuit (Dandoy, 2010; Hepburn, 2010: 42; Fagerholm, 2016; Cachafeiro et al, 2006: 251). There is also likely to be variation within a single party over time, as parties adjust and adapt their goals in response to internal and external forces (Sorens, 2008: 328-9; Tierney, 2005: 162; Kellas, 2004: 11; Coppetiers, 2003: 5).

Research questions

As a result of these obstacles, we know less than we should about what self-government means in practice. In this research, I explore two key questions. Firstly, what do sub-state nationalist parties want? And more importantly, operating from the assumption that sub-state nationalist parties are rational actors pursuing goals they believe to be achievable, how do their goals reflect strategic considerations, understanding of the contexts in which they are expressed, and their historical positions? By comparing three cases, a third question is explored, assessing the ways in which variation in the empirical contexts in which these goals are articulated may manifest in variation in the framing of self-government goals.

The self-government goal presented by a given sub-state nationalist party can be considered a reflection of what Rudolph and Thompson (1985) describe as the '*art of the possible*', a pragmatic understanding of what might be achieved under a system of constraints rather than the single-minded pursuit of self-government, regardless of its costs and consequences. This suggests that sub-state nationalist parties are rational, strategic actors. It is in this area that my thesis makes its core contribution.

I begin from the premise that sub-state nationalist parties balance both value rationality, a fundamental belief in the nation and the necessity of some degree of self-government, and instrumental rationality, a pragmatic approach to the realities of self-government (Varsheny, 2003). The goals advanced by sub-state nationalist parties will therefore reflect a core belief in the existence of the nation and the need for self-government as well as a practical consideration of the opportunities and constraints present in factors external to the nation.

Three empirical contexts, are of interest in this research: the international, and more specifically European arena; the state in which the sub-state nation is situated; and the party system in which sub-state nationalist party goals are pursued. Each has been discussed in the literature individually but to my knowledge, no systematic analysis of a party's goal in light of these contexts has been carried out.

Self-government in Scotland and Flanders

In order to fully capture the complexity of self-government goals and the contexts in which they are expressed, three case studies, in two territorial contexts, are studied in depth. The first is the Scottish National Party, which seeks political independence for Scotland. The other two are parties which emerged in Flanders, the Volksunie, which existed between 1954 and 2001, and its successor, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. These cases represent some of the most successful sub-state nationalist parties, both in electoral terms, particularly in recent years, and arguably in making progress towards their self-government goals.

A longitudinal approach, which studies the three cases from their origins to 2014, or their dissolution in the case of the VU, is adopted which allows both within-case and cross-case comparison. While this small number of cases restricts my ability to generalise more

widely, the focus on a limited number of important cases allows me to assess the ways in which changes in the forum or domain in which self-government goals were expressed manifest in the party's articulation of self-government goals.

Thesis structure

Chapter one introduces the theoretical framework that underpins this work. In this chapter, sub-state nationalist parties are defined, and their origins are explored. I then discuss the nature of the self-government goals as advanced by sub-state nationalist parties, outlining a typology of goals and identifying some of the challenges classifying parties by goals present. I discuss sub-state nationalist parties as strategic and rational actors before introducing the framework used in this thesis and exploring the ways in which self-government goals are influenced by the empirical context in which they are pursued.

Chapter two sets out the research design and methodology employed in this thesis. I first outline my research questions and identify the key components of this research: the self-government goals held by each party and the empirical context which inform their articulation. This chapter also details the case selection, the use of comparison and the process of data collection and data analysis, specifically framing analysis.

Chapter three serves three key purposes: providing a contextual introduction to the three cases selected for inclusion in this study: the Scottish National Party, the Volksunie, and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, examining the way in which self-government goals were labelled from each party's origins to the present day, and presenting an analysis of the way in which the purposes of self-government, whether value rational or instrumental, were framed in each case. The remainder of the empirical analysis is covered in the four chapters which follow.

Chapter four discusses the ways in which self-government goals interact with the European and international context in which they are expressed, considering the influence of changes in the international structure, the development of European project, and the ways in which European and global identities were instrumentalised.

Chapter five analyses the ways in which the structure of the embedding state influences the articulation of self-government goals. I focus specifically on the state and existing state

structures, and the ways in which these are used as a justification for self-government, the response of each party to both proposed and realised state reform falling short of their ultimate self-government goals, and a discussion of relationships between the sub-state and the embedding state once self-government has been achieved.

Chapter six focuses on the pursuit of self-government with reference to the party system in which the sub-state nationalist parties operate, capturing an important strategic component. Here, the positioning of each party through which self-government is to be achieved and the potential of the party system to facilitate self-government is assessed.

Chapter seven, the final empirical chapter focuses on the ways in which self-government was articulated by the Scottish National Party and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie in advance of the 2014 Scottish referendum and Belgium elections. In this chapter, I return to the three empirical contexts detailed above and explore them with reference to the 2014 proposals, which for each party represents the most comprehensive statement of their self-government goals to date.

This thesis comes to a close with **chapter eight**, which will synthesise, compare and contrast key findings within and across the cases. It will reflect upon the framing of self-government goals and the empirical contexts in which they are expressed, as well as the meanings of self-government and the strategic behaviour of sub-state nationalist parties in light of these findings. It will consider the implications of framing in our understanding of self-government goals as well as address the contribution of this research to the broader literature

Chapter One: Conceptualizing sub-state nationalist parties

In this dissertation, I analyse the content and framing of the self-government goals advocated by the Scottish National Party, the Volksunie, and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. This work rests on several key assumptions, derived from the literature and developed further throughout this research. Firstly, sub-state nationalist parties are those parties which advance, as their core business, the realisation of a specific self-government goal. Secondly, this pursuit is driven by a specific set of values held by sub-state nationalist parties - the right to self-determination, self-government, or sovereignty of the nation the party seeks to represent. Thirdly, sub-state nationalist parties are rational actors, seeking to pursue their goal within a specific electoral context as well as cognisant of various institutional realities. Finally, I argue that self-government goals, as expressed by sub-state nationalist parties, reflect two key components - their commitment to the values of self-government for their nation and their interpretations of the opportunity and constraints unique to their particular institutional contexts. These institutional constraints include the international, and in particular in the case of the parties included in this research, European context, the structure of the embedding state, and the party and electoral system in which the parties compete. Changes in these institutional structures are assumed to have an impact on the content and framing of self-government goals.

In the theoretical framework which follows, I first define sub-state nationalist parties and set out the characteristics of these parties. I then assess typologies of self-government goals and present an adapted model of these goals. I address my core assumption - that sub-state nationalist parties are rational actors - before discussing the historical institutionalist framework which frames this research. Finally, I present my external framework, identifying key institutional contexts which will be explored in this research.

1.1 Defining sub-state nationalist parties

Sub-state nationalist parties are treated as a distinctive party family but share common characteristics with parties generally. Sartori (1976: 62) defines political parties as '*any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through election, candidates for public office*'. At their most basic, Panebianco (1988: 7) considers parties as '*instruments for the realization of specific (and specifiable) goals*'. Within the broader

classification of political parties exists a set of parties whose specific and specifiable goals are to advance the territorial interests at the level below the state.

The study of these parties has been hindered by terminological complexity and competing definitions (Fagerholm, 2016). Parties mobilising in defence of the interests of their culturally distinct and territorially concentrated group have been described and defined in a variety of ways, reflecting their ethnic, territorial, regional, and nationalist dimensions. Labels include '*ethnoregionalist*', (De Winter & Türsan, 1998; De Winter & Cachafeiro, 2002; Tronconi, 2006; Dandoy, 2010) '*ethno*' and '*ethnic nationalists*', (Connor, 1977) '*ethno-regionalists*' (Müller-RommelRommel, 1998; Newman, 1994), '*ethnoterritorial*' parties (Rudolph & Thompson, 1985; Meguid, 2008), '*regionalists*', (de Winter & Türsan, 1998; Massetti & Schakel, 2016), '*mini-nationalists*', (Snyder, 1982) '*peripheral*' and '*stateless*' nations, (Keating, 2001; Minhahan, 2002; Friend, 2012; McCrone, 1998) '*nations against the state*' (Keating, 1996), and '*minority nationalists*' (Elias, 2009b; Lynch & Dewinter, 2008; Keating & McGarry, 2001; Kymlicka, 2001) Müller-RommelRommel defines the term ethno-regionalist parties as '*referring to the efforts of geographically concentrated peripheral minorities which challenge the working order and sometimes even the democratic order of a nation-state by demanding recognition of their cultural identity*' (Müller-RommelRommel 1998: 19). Türsan defines these parties as '*ethnically based territorial movements that aim to modify their relations with the state*' (Türsan 1998: 5). v

Hepburn's work represents an attempt to reconcile the various labels and definitions present in the literature, adopting the broad designation of stateless nationalist and regionalist parties (SNRPs). She identified as SNRPs those parties whose

> *'core business is sub-state territorial empowerment, whereby empowerment involves seeking to represent and advance the particular interest of the stateless territory - be it referred to as a region, nation, people or Heimat - and where territorial interests may be economic, political, social, cultural or symbolic in nature'*
>
> Hepburn, 2009: 482.

Although a heterogeneous, and contested, party family in terms of origins, ideology, and goals, we can assume that these parties, by virtue of their ambitions for territorial empowerment, have some common features (Fagerholm, 2016; Rokkan & Urwin, 1983: 227).

For the purposes of this research, the narrower sub-state nationalist party label is adopted as the cases of interest to this research consider themselves to represent the nation rather than the region, as regionalist parties can be a broad term, designated both parties which compete only in the sub-state and statewide parties which have reoriented themselves towards the region, which might include the Christian Democrats in Flanders (Witte et al., 2009: 425). My designation of sub-state nationalist parties has four key components: (1) the claim to represent a specific community or nation; (2) the mobilisation of the party in a specific territory; (3) the pursuit of a preferred constitutional or territorial outcome; and (4) the pursuit of these goals through democratic means.

Firstly, sub-state nationalist parties claim act on the behalf of, and represent the interests of, a specific **community or nation**, broadly defined (Hepburn, 2010; Finlayson, 1998: 105). This community or nation can be considered as *'the historically settled and territorially concentrated societies that have developed national consciousness but do not have their own sovereign state*' (Lluch 2014: 4). This claim of community is important as it indicates a sense of belonging, often rooted in historical experiences (Urwin 1983: 225). It represents an assumption that the community is distinctive and should be accorded some degree of self-government on the basis of its distinctiveness, manifesting in political claims for recognition and accommodation (Keating, 2001: 2; Brubaker, 2004: 115). This often takes the form of a claim to self-determination, based upon the idea that these communities or '*nations have an inherent right to determine their own future*' (Lecours, 2012: 104).

The focus on mobilising the community or national group within a **specific territory** forms the second component of my criteria (Urwin 1983: 23; Türsan, 1998: 5; Bulpitt, 1983: 52; Linz, 1985: 205) Territory is a central concern for both sub-state nations and nation-states (Kaplan, 1999: 31) This focus on territory implies that parties will mobilise only within this specific territory, competing for votes within Catalonia, Flanders, Scotland, Wales, or Quebec rather than on a statewide level (Massetti, 2009: 503). These societies should be territorially based and '*not coincident*' with the boundaries of the state (Rokkan & Urwin, 1982: 128). This territorial component distinguishes sub-state nationalist parties from those representing a minority dispersed within a state. Kellas (2004: 10) goes so far as to describe this as a '*territorial imperative'*. A territorial basis is necessary, in practical terms, for political mobilisation and may also be linked with identity (Keating, 2001: 3; Rokkan & Urwin, 1982: 128; Murphy, 2002: 196). In assessing ethno-

regionalist parties, Urwin (1983: 232) declares that territory is the unifying factor within this party family, '*the only thing*' that they all share.

Thirdly, sub-state nationalist parties are characterised by the pursuit of their **preferred constitutional or territorial outcome**. Acting in the name of a territorially concentrated national group, a sub-state nationalist parties makes claims for some degree of recognition or self-government, usually as a result of some sense of dissatisfaction with the structure or behaviour of the central state (Mikesell & Murphy, 1991: 581). These goals will vary both between and within parties, with the degree of self-government claims ranging from autonomy to full independence as discussed in section 1.2. However, parties are unified by their '*demand for political reorganisation of the existing national power structure*' for some sort of self-government (De Winter, 1998: 204). These goals may be justified with reference to cultural, economic, or political grievances, in language or cultural practices, or in a historical legacy of independence (Keating & McGarry, 2001: 6; Hepburn, 2009: 483; Keating & Gagnon, 2012). Their self-government goals, and the ways in which they are pursued, are of interest to this research.

Finally, I restrict my focus here on parties which operate within **democratic contexts** and use democratic, primarily electoral, means of pursuing their goals. The means available to sub-state nationalist parties have been classified by Rokkan and Urwin (1982: 146-7) in descending degree of radicalism to include violence and terror, civil disobedience, non-electoral mechanisms of political participation, the formation of specific political movements, and participation within mainstream parties. For the purpose of this research, I exclude movements which do not manifest as political parties and those parties which engage in extra-parliamentary means, including violence and political uprisings. This is rooted in my interest in political discourse and political strategy as itmanifests in electoral competition. It is also rooted in an assumption that nationalist politics fall within the realm of what Sorens (2008) describes as '*normal politics*'. In other words, it should not be treated as something exceptional or irrational, exempt from the compromises and negotiation of everyday negotiation.

All cases examined in this thesis share these criteria in common, but it is the third criteria, the preferred constitutional or territorial outcome, or self-government goal, which is the object of my analysis. While sub-state nationalist parties share a criteria of pursuing self-

government, how they label and substantiate their goals can vary across time and space and it is this variation that is of interest in this research.

1.2 Sub-state nationalist parties and self-government goals

Sub-state nationalist parties all make a '*claim upon the state*' (Urwin, 1983: 232). These goals have been described as '*nationalist aspirations*' (Keating 2001), '*operational objectives*' (Rudolph & Thompson, 1985: 294), '*articulated aspirations*' (Mikesell & Murphy, 1991: 582), '*constitutional programmes*' (Tierney, 2005: 161), and '*self-government demands*' (De Winter & Türsan, 1998).

Within these claims or demands, we can find calls for various state structures, or '*different degrees of preferred self-government*' (Dandoy, 2010: 215). These encompass a wide range of goals, some of which can be accommodated within the state, while others require external articulation, ranging from recognition and protection of a national minority to political independence (Keating, 2001: 7). For clarity, I will refer to self-government goals, using this term to refer to the range of constitutional aims and objectives of a sub-state nationalist party, adopting Rokkan and Urwin's definition of these goals to refer to '*the relationship between the periphery in question and the core of the state after the conflict has been resolved, as perceived by the movement*' (Rokkan & Urwin, 1982: 142).

In this section, I will explore variation in self-government goals, examining existing typologies and critically assessing the utility of the distinctions drawn between different degrees of self-government, discussing what Schlesinger (1975: 840), in his analysis of political parties more generally, characterises as the '*thorny problem'* of party goals.

1.2.1 Typologies of self-government

Efforts have been made to classify the self-government goals of sub-state nationalist parties, in the form of typologies. Largely, these typologies follow a similar schema, presenting goals on a spectrum, from less to more radical. This presentation suggests degrees of self-government and a potential for movement along the spectrum. As discussed below, classifications of the goals of sub-state nationalist parties typically divide goals into demands for protection, recognition, and access to the centre, demands for internal self-government, including autonomy and federalism, and demands for external self-government, including independence, irredentistisme, and rattachisme. These goals

are clearly ideal types, and parties may embrace or reject these labels or employ more creative or euphemistic terms.

Rokkan and Urwin (1982: 143) present a '*pyramid of peripheral aims*', with full integration of a minority group sitting at the bottom of the pyramid and full independence at the top. They suggest a process of escalation, with acts of '*peripheral identity building*' to be followed by protest and mobilisation within regional structures. Rudolph and Thompson's (1985) model outlines four types of goals held by ethnoterritorial movements which speaks to possible motivations. These include: (a) attempts to expand the resources available to a specific region; (b) a shift in the nature of political authority or where decisions are made; (c) changing the structure of the political regime through federalisation; (d) challenging the legitimacy of the state in favour of independence and irredentism (Rudolph & Thompson, 1985: 292)

The schemas presented by De Winter and Türsan (1998), Bugajski (1994), Dandoy (2010) broadly follow this model, with some instances of variation. Dandoy (2010) draws a helpful distinction within the protectionist category between conservative protectionists, who seek preservation and recognition, and participationists, who seek integration at the centre. Dandoy's classification also makes note of primary goals versus future aspirations which is often overlooked in static models. Coakley's (1993: 6-7) model of demands follows a similar line of reasoning, distinguishing between demands for equality of citizenship, for cultural rights, for institutional political recognition, which may include autonomy or influence at the centre, and finally, for secession, defined broadly to include independence and irredentism. The *Minorities at Risk* coding schema focuses on the degree of challenge to the state that each claim presents. The scale is designed to capture movement,classified as radicalization or de-radicalization (Jenne et al, 2007: 545).

The scale of '*articulated aspirations*' offered by Mikesell and Murphy (1991) ranges from recognition to independence. Within what De Winter and Türsan (1998) or Dandoy (2010) would class broadly as protection, Mikesell and Murphy (1991 include recognition, as the acknowledgement of the group's existence and respect for its language or culture and access in the form of affirmative action, economic assistance, and anti-discrimination. Internal arrangements involve mechanisms for the participation of a minority group in policy making at the centre, separation, including community autonomy or exemptions

from societal norms, and autonomy, which is used broadly to include federalism, regional administrative decentralisation, and federalism. Finally, independence is an external form of self-government. While this takes into account both institutional and policy measures, they also note the challenges in classifying parties in this way. '*Between recognition and participation and between separation and independence are numerous shadings of gray, exemplified by the ambivalent notions of "qualified access" and "semi-autonomy*" (Mikesell & Murphy, 1991: 582).

Snyder (1982) provides a more gradated typology of the ambitions of '*mini-nationalists*', distinguishing between autonomy, semi-autonomy, semi-sovereignty, devolution, separatism, secession and independence. He draws a distinction between separatism, secession, and independence, with separatism forming the goal, secession as the formal act, and independence as '*goal of complete freedom*' (Snyder, 1982). His contribution introduces a distinction between processes and goals but the exact boundaries of the self-government goals presented in this framework are unclear.

Müller-Rommel's (1994: 186-7) work classifies nationalist and regionalist parties according to degrees of self-government but is distinct from other classifications on the basis of its inclusion of a broader international or supranational context which is of interest to this research. His first two categories are consistent with other typologies, including protectionist and autonomist parties but rather than classifying independence parties as one bloc, he examines the specific content of their self-government goals. Müller-Rommel distinguishes between left-libertarian federalists, which demand more radical constitutional reform but also make reference to the broader European context, particularly, given the time it was written, the Europe of the regions, and *'separatist parties'* which adopt a more traditional conception of sovereignty and reject international integration. This distinction is an important one, capturing the positions of parties which seek far-reaching autonomy within the context of both the embedding state and the European Community (ibid: 186-7). However, it remains limited, failing to take into account how the goals of a party might also reflect relationships closer to home.

There is a growing body of work that attempts to take into account the motivations and strategies of sub-state nationalist parties in expressing their demands, including Meadwell (2009), Massetti (2009) and Lluch (2014). Although underspecified, Meadwell (2009) draws a distinction between '*sincere secessionists*', those who are committed to the pursuit of

political independence and '*insincere secessionists'*, those who employ claims for independence as a means of extracting concessions falling short of this goal. I will return to his work on sub-state nationalist parties as strategic actors in the following section.

Massetti (2009) also examines motivations and primary goals. He draws a distinction between autonomist parties - those who seek accommodation within the existing state structure whether through federalism, confederalism or devolution - and secessionist parties - those who seek withdrawal from the existing state. He then draws a further distinction within these two broad categories, in a classification that speaks to means, motivation and strategy, an important contribution to our understanding of self-government goals (ibid: 505). In Massetti's schema, the autonomist bloc is composed of moderate autonomists, which advance more moderate requests or follow more outspoken competitors, while assertive autonomists are those that '*seek extensive autonomy for their region and/or lead requests for federal (or even confederal) reforms*' (ibid: 505). Secessionist parties are divided by their means and commitment to the cause, with a distinction made between extremist/violent secessionists and strongly committed and ambiguous secessionist. Extremist secessionists are identified by their links with terrorist organisations and use of extra-parliamentary mechanisms. Strongly committed secessionists are identified by the salience of their independence objectives, '*keep[ing] their policy of independence and their claims to self-determination continuously upfront in their discourse and documents, even in periods when they negotiate solutions short of independence*'. Ambiguous secessionists use ambiguous formulae, or downplay their self-government goals over time (ibid: 505). While the distinction drawn by Massetti on degrees of autonomy is captured in previous models, the distinction between ambiguous and strongly committed secessionists is a helpful one, speaking to both discourse and strategy. Massetti's work also acknowledges the potential for parties to shift over time.

Lluch's 2014 model, applied to Catalan and Quebecois nationalists, focuses on the '*visions of sovereignty'* or '*orientations*' of sub-state nationalist movements in an attempt to capture the '*complex rainbow of political preferences*' (Lluch, 2014: 6). This model, like earlier efforts, places these orientations on a spectrum, from least to most decentralising but also attempts to take into account some of the motivational factors at play in the pursuit of self-government goals. It also looks at variation within sub-state nationalist communities in which debates take place over the appropriate degree of sovereignty to be sought.

Lluch draws a distinction between federalists, autonomists, and independentists but introduces a motivational element to his classification by distinguishing between instrumental and teleological actors. Instrumental actors see autonomy as '*a valuable vehicle for achieving their self-determination objectives*' but acknowledge that autonomy may be a stepping stone towards greater autonomy. In contrast, teleological autonomists see autonomy as the '*end result of their political requests*' (ibid: 21). Lluch's definition of autonomism, '*the search for gradually expanding spheres of self-government*', suggests a progression, or an assumption that parties will call for more powers (ibid: 177). He goes on to distinguish between '*traditional federalist*' parties, in which federalism is a means of satisfying the demands of a sub-state nationalist community and '*instrumental federalists*', for whom federalism may be a stepping stone. Independentist parties are further subdivided into *pactists*, which seek to negotiate continued political or economic association with the embedding state, and *principled independentist*, who Lluch suggests tend to advocate a '*complete rupture with the majority nation*' (ibid: 151). Presented as a spectrum of goals, Lluch identifies federalist goals as most moderate, followed by teleological autonomists, instrumental federalists, instrumental autonomists, and independentists goals on the radical end of the spectrum (ibid: 21). While Lluch's model provides a useful insight into within-case variation and short and long-term self-government goals, it does not speak directly to the justifications for self-government, an area which this research seeks to expand upon.

Although the models presented vary in their specificity and presentation, they all suggest that self-government goals, labelled broadly, take the form of a continuum, ranging from **moderate demands** for recognition and protection (Sorens, 2008: 326; Jenne et al, 2007: 546; Dandoy, 2010), to demands for **internal self-government**, including autonomy and federalism (Mancini, 2008: 566), to **external self-government**, which includes demands for confederalism, political independence or irredentism. My interest in this research sits within the more radical end of the spectrum, encompassing demands for internal and external self-government which involve a radical reform or dismantlement of the embedding state.

Confederalism and political independence require additional specification, due to the way in which the terms are employed in political discourse and their relevance to the cases examined here. Lluch (2014: 149) describes the use of the term confederalism by

nationalist politicians as '*conceptually muddled*', departing from traditional academic definitions. Here, I depart from other scholars in classifying confederalism, with independence, as external self-government, rather than as a model of internal self-government. Confederalist parties seek the inversion of the federal model, a scenario in which constituent confederal units decide which powers are awarded to the centre, a model which implies a shift in where autonomy lies (Dandoy, 2010: 207). Swenden (2006: 13), informed by its use in the Belgian case,outlines four characteristics of a confederal arrangement which makes it distinct from a federal arrangement, noting (1) confederal entities retain their sovereignty; (2) unlike in a federal structure, these entities retain their right to withdraw; (3) confederal centres '*do not act directly upon the people*', and (4) decisions of the centre require the consent of all units. This goal suggests a desire to maintain some of the trappings of the state, even in a hollowed form, while at the same time according sovereignty to its constituent units, blurring the distinction between internal and external self-government. However, because of where power is considered to be located, I treat it as a form of external self-government.

Definitions of independence stress three main components related to the process of independence or the act of withdrawl: the location of sovereignty; and international recognition. Firstly, the process of independence involves an act of secession or separation - the exit of a specified territory from a state and the formation of a new state (Brancati, 2014: 76; Dandoy, 2010; Wolff, 2004: 5). Put simply, state-seeking parties are those '*wanting to substitute new states for the old*' (Keating, 2001). Tierney describes '*statist secessionism*' in which actors seek to form a new nation-state (Tierney, 2005: 172). Secondly, this newly formed state is to be considered as sovereign, with the transfer of sovereignty from the old state to the new (Dandoy, 2010). Sovereignty is of course a contested concept, with both sub-state nationalists and states themselves acknowledging its changing nature. Finally, it will seek and achieve international legal recognition.

1.2.2 A thorny problem of self-government goals

While the models discussed above provide a good way of classifying and sorting sub-state nationalist parties at a single point in time, they are ideal types and have significant limitations. Scholars of party politics note the challenges in identifying the true goals of a party, or the '*thorny problem of party goals*' (Schlesinger, 1975: 840). This challenge is said to be rooted in the plurality of goals held by members of a single organisation (Panebianco,

1988; 7; Schlesinger, 1975: 840), the likelihood of goals changing, and the difficulty in identifying the '*true*' goal of the party (Laver, 2014), or their stated goals versus what would be pursued in office (Mair, 1989: 170). Laver (2014) notes that, within any party, there may be '*conscious sincere private desires*', '*publically stated positions*', '*policies the person might actually implement'* and *'policies actually implemented*'. Although sub-state nationalist parties are unified by their raison d'être, the goal of self-government, identifying the nature and extent of this goal can be challenging.

The utility of existing typologies of the goal-orientation of sub-state autonomist and nationalist parties is limited as a result of, and to varying degrees by: (1) the tendency to treat parties as static actors, obscuring both variation over time and divides within a single party; (2) divisions within the party; (3) the challenges of cross-case comparison as a result of variation in language; and (4) the tendency to take labels at face value rather than evaluating what these self-government goals actually contain and mean. Finally, there is a tendency, although diminished, of treating all sub-state nationalist parties, no matter their stated goals, as seeking, political independence. Each of these will be addressed in turn.

Firstly, the classification of a given party by its self-government goal treats parties as static, an assumption that has been acknowledged as problematic in the literature (Hepburn, 2010: 42; Dandoy, 2010; De Winter, 1998: 208). Temporal variation can take two forms: change over time in response to emerging events; and a strategic component which draws a distinction between near and long-term goals. Parties may adapt their goals in response to emerging events, for example, changing external conditions, the partial achievement of goals, or the response of the state. In addition, there may be a strategic temporal dimension, with a given party holding two or more goals simultaneously, one to be pursued in the near-term, with other goals for the medium to long-term, or as an ultimate aspiration of the party. Toubeau (2011: 432) suggests '*it is often genuinely difficult to determine whether a party's expressed goal represents a sincerely held belief or a short-term tactic for reaching a longer term political objective*'. For example, parties may use moderate aspirations to mask more radical goals, or express radical goals in the hope of reaching a more moderate compromise. Sorens (2008: 328-9) draws a distinction between '*unconditional secessionism',* in which *'no amount of within-state autonomy that the central government is likely to offer would satisfy regional ambitions*', and '*conditional secessionism*', in which some degree of autonomy might be favoured over none. Tierney describes this complexity, noting that parties may pursue

accommodation within the state while at the same time seeking opportunities for participation on the international stage, with sub-state nationalist parties employing *'a deeply ambivalent strategy of operating more effectively inside, and when the opportunity avails itself and is attractive, partly beyond, the nation-state*' (Tierney, 2005: 162). Parties may pursue a more radical goal in the long-term while seeking to increase the power and capacity of the sub-state government in the short term (Coppetiers, 2003: 5). They may also be willing to settle for less than their stated goal, accepting significant autonomy in place of independent statehood (Kellas, 2004: 11; Coppetiers, 2003: 5).

Secondly, a focus on classifying parties can overlook internal divisions within the party – on both the ultimate goal and the strategic pursuit of this goal. Although unified by a demand for self-government, members of sub-state nationalist parties may have differing preferences or visions of what that self-government should entail (Dandoy, 2010; Hepburn, 2010: 42; Fagerholm, 2016). Different goals may be held by members of a political party, with factions advocating federalism or confederalism, while others advocate political independence. The stated self-government goal of a party may reflect internal power dynamics or the predominance of one faction or another (Gomes-Reino et al., 2006: 251). Internal variation in preferences has been documented both within sub-state national societies (Muñoz & Guinjoan, 2013; Conversi, 2000; Lluch, 2012) but also within parties themselves, including the Volksunie (Wauters, 2005), the Scottish National Party (Mitchell et al, 2012; Brand, 1992). Voters may back a party but not back their self-government goals. While these internal dynamics are beyond the scope of research, it is an important potential explanation of change over time.

Thirdly, and relevant to cross-case comparisons, a reliance on a party's self-identification can inhibit comparison. Labels are used differently in different contexts, making comparison more difficult. Parties might also be strategically ambiguous when setting out their goals, using an adaptation of an existing territorial arrangement, or foregoing these terms all together in favour of the language of freedom or home rule (Connor, 1994: 83; McCrone, 1998: 145). Variation can also take place over time, reflecting both the language and constitutional tendencies of the day (Keating & Gagnon, 2012). Parties may use the familiar labels of autonomy, devolution, federalism, confederalism or independence, but employ them in a way that reflects contemporary circumstances or political contexts. Some objectives are explicitly used in ways that appear to combine both radical secession

and continued relationships with the state from which the sub-state nationalist parties aim to secede, as in the goals of sovereignty-association and sovereignty partnership employed by the Parti Québécois in the 1980 and 1995 referendums respectively (Gagnon & LaChapelle, 1996).

Fourthly, and most relevant to this research is the focus on labelling rather than content. While we may be able to classify parties according to their stated goals, what do these goals actually mean and what conditions do they reflect? Self-government goals are increasingly complex, reflecting dynamics internal to the state in which a party operates and the broader external context which is characterised by interdependence. In response, Hepburn (2010: 40) argues that parties are '*searching for forms of autonomy that are less clear than independent statehood*'. The changing nature of self-government goals is increasingly acknowledged when it comes to the international context, with sovereignty considered to have diminished salience in the contemporary world (Keating, 2001; MacCormick, 2010; Tierney, 2005; Keating & Gagnon, 2012). In response to processes of globalisation, Europeanisation, and increasing interdependence, parties may have '*rethought their aims and strategy in light of these developments, often drawing on older traditions in the process*' (Keating, 2001: 59). Keating argues that sub-state nationalist parties have been flexible, looking beyond Westphalian traditions to forms of coordination and management, including close associations. As a result, *'independent statehood no longer means what it once did*' (Keating & Gagnon, 2012: 4). While these analyses provide valuable insights into a party's understanding of what self-government means vis-à-vis the international institutional context, other contexts remain important, including the development of the internal structures of the state and the dynamics of the party system in which sub-state nationalist parties pursue their self-government goals.

A final point should be addressed here – namely the tendency, in some older branches of the literature, to automatically equate the self-government sought by sub-state nationalist parties with the pursuit of independence, overtly or covertly (Gellner, 1983; Kaplan, 1999). Ernest Gellner (1983: 51) describes the linkage between the nation and the state as nations needing statehood, just as '*every girl ought to have a husband*' while Kaplan (1999) argues that state sovereignty is '*essential*', arguing that '*Self-described nations are either in charge of their political destiny or share in the goals of eventual self-determination*'. Kellas' (2004: 11)

assertion that nationalists '*may settle for less*' but will ultimately seek nation-statehood suggests a similar perspective.

Despite these statements, there is wide variation in the self-government goals pursued by parties.Explicit support of independence as a self-government goal is relatively rare within Western contexts (Connor, 1994: 82; Keating, 2001: 8; Tierney, 2005: 176; Norman, 2006: 75; Brubaker, 2004: 116; Buchanan, 2004: 332). Keating (2001: 11) challenges the equation of a desire for self-government with a desire for independence, arguing '*there is nothing inconsistent in the idea that stateless nations may have the rights to self-government which are limited by reciprocal obligations and the rights of other nations, and so fall short of statehood*'. Sutherland (2011: 104) calls into question '*[t]he image of all sub-state nationalists as separatist and isolationist, obsessed with having their own state and achieving absolute sovereignty, complete with connotations of autarchy'* as anachronistic and inaccurate. This is understandable if we start from the assumption that sub-state nationalist parties as rational actors, seeking an achievable solution. By focusing narrowly on parties seeking independence as a separate class '*is to ignore the infinitely protean nature of nationalist politics'* (Brubaker, 1996: 276). As a result, in this work, I accept the proposition, put forth by Sambanis and Milanovic (2011) that there is '*no natural divide between these phenomena*', as they represent the same process. However, I contend that there may be a distinction to be drawn between internal and external manifestations of goals which may affect the level and type of engagement with the external contexts.

More broadly, an overemphasis on classification risks introducing an artificial distinction between parties on the basis of their goals, when these parties may be more fruitfully analysed as part of the same phenomenon. There may, however, be variation in levels and types of engagement with the external contexts. Wewould expect parties seeking external self-government to engage more fully with the international and European context.

The fact that we encounter challenges in classifying sub-state nationalist parties according to their self-government goals suggests something about the parties themselves. Parties may modify their goals to reflect the internal composition and power dynamics within their own parties, employing ambiguous language to maximise votes or capitalise on public preferences, and pursuing goals in the short and long term, viewing more moderate goals as a stepping stone towards more radical self-government. Each is advancing a goal which they consider to reconcile the need for self-government with the constraints and

opportunities posed by the system in which they are operating, reflecting the art of the possible. In the following section, I will outline my assumptions about parties as rational actors before turning to the dimensions of self-government. Together, they provide the theoretical framework for the research which follows.

1.3 Sub-state nationalist parties: assessing strategy and rationality

This research rests on the assertion that sub-state nationalist parties, like parties more generally, are rational actors, with self-government goals forming their raison d'être. We can see evidence of this rationality in two interrelated dimensions: firstly, the ways in which parties seek to realise their self-government goals, and secondly, the way that self-government goals are adapted to the context in which they are articulated. The goal of this research is to capture the interaction between these beliefs and political behaviour, studying sub-state nationalist parties in what Newman describes '*the banality of their stretch for political power*' (Newman, 2000: 28).

This notion of sub-state nationalist parties as rational has been, at points, contested within the literature. Halliday (2000: 159) takes the position that nationalism is inherently irrational, '*to apply any calculus of cost and benefit to national self-determination, to treat it as a normative aspiration that is subject to any other, higher, normative or prudential evaluation, is to challenge its self-definition*'. However, there is a growing body of literature which suggests that sub-state nationalist parties are strategic, both in their political behaviour and in the articulation of their self-government goals.

In the section which follows, I will discuss the understanding of parties more generally as rational actors, before turning to the specific literature which explores the rationality of sub-state nationalist parties.. I will then present Varshney's (2003) conceptualization of nationalism as an interplay between value and instrumental rationality, which will be underpin this work. I will then assess some of the constraints on sub-state nationalist parties.

1.3.1 Sub-state nationalism: goals and strategy

Unlike traditional parties, sub-state nationalist parties have been, at times, treated as static actors, unable to behave strategically in pursuit of their self-government goals. This is a

result of a tendency to treat nationalism as inherently irrational rather than subject to rational assessments of costs, benefits, and self-interest (Hardin, 1995: 14). It is also rooted in a now contested assumption thatsub-state nationalist parties are niche actors, defined by what they offer rather than their ability to adapt to the preferences of their supporters or voters (Meguid, 2005; 2008; Jensen & Spoon, 2010). Niche parties were first defined by Meguid (2005) on the basis of their rejection of the traditional class-based orientation of politics, their mobilization on issues outside the standard dimension of party politics, and positioning on a limited range of issues. Niche parties were perceived as less strategic, unwilling to compromise on core issues in order to enter into government or gain votes. The classification of sub-state nationalist parties as niche has been challenged, with Hepburn (2009: 489) arguing that some sub-state nationalist parties have moved '*from niche to normal*'. Wagner's (2012: 848) assessment of nicheness requires that parties focus exclusively on the issue of decentralisation, disregarding economic and other policy issues (see Elias, 2009a, Alonso, 2012, and Lluch, 2014 for discussions of the nicheness of sub-state nationalist parties).

On the basis of this assumption, we can look at the broader party literature on party goals and the ways in which parties may modify their goals in a competitive context. We can understand parties in two ways, (1) as inherently conservative actors wary of the risks associated with shifts in positions or (2) as rational actors in pursuit of certain benefits shifting positions accordingly (Harmel & Janda; 1994; Harmel et al, 1995). In reality, parties are both opportunistic and cautious. For Janda (1990), parties are understood as '*adaptive agents in search of votes*', whether in present or future electoral competitions. Parties may shift their positions to maintain or maximise their electoral support but they act within certain constraints. These constraints originate from the voter, from the organisational structure of the party, and from the institution context in which the party operates (Strøm, 1990: 566). Parties therefore need to maintain a minimum degree of credibility, as *'[e]ven in a world of selfish utility-maximizers a reputation for responsibility and reliability is worth votes*' (Budge & Keman, 1993). Smaller parties, like single-issue parties or substate nationalist parties, according to Harmel et al (1995: 5), may be less driven by electoral goals and therefore, less likely to shift in response to changes in vote share. The sensitivity of parties, or their predisposition to adapt their goals can be understood with reference to their orientation.

The model in which parties are votes-seeking, office-seeking, or policy-seeking, introduced by Strøm (1990) is at its core a model of rational behaviour by political actors. According to this model, each party has a '*primary goal*', whether votes, office, or policy (ibid). This varies between parties in a party system, suggesting that some parties are more committed to policy, while others prioritise votes and still others, office (Harmel & Janda, 1994: 265). Parties with vote-seeking, office-seeking, or policy-seeking orientations are faced with the question of '*how to define their private desires (eg. for office or a theocratic state) into an acceptable public position that will not repel votes*' (Budge, 2006).

Following the tradition of Downs, the parties are generally understood as vote-seeking, specifically vote-maximizing, moving strategically to capture the maximum number of votes (Downs, 1957). Votes can be used instrumentally and can be thought of as political currency used to purchase office or policy (Strøm, 1990: 573). Parties primarily motivated by votes are likely to adapt their positions to maximise votes. In contrast, small parties, which cater to a limited segment of the electorate may '*defy the logic of catch-all*' competition and have less flexibility in their movements (Strøm, 1990).

Office-seeking goals are closely linked with the prioritisation of votes. Office-seeking can be understood as the pursuit of two objectives, firstly, the pursuit of seats within the parliament or representative body and secondly, of participation in the governing body or coalition (Strøm, 1990: 567; Wolinetz, 2006: 152). Budge and Laver explain the complexity in understanding office-seeking behaviour, noting that office may be a means of achieving power in a Downsian sense or alternatively, it maybe be valued instrumentally '*for the ability that it gives to influence policy outputs*' (Budge & Laver, 1986: 490). In the context of electoral competition, office-seeking parties will therefore '*avoid policy commitments which might make it undesirable as a coalition party and eschew electoral strategies, such as attacking electoral prospective partners too fiercely, which would make coalitions impossible*' (Wolinetz, 2006: 152). Even new parties, green, new right, or sub-state nationalist parties, tend to orient themselves towards the pursuit of office, at least at some levels of government (Katz & Mair, 2002). However, the decision might be made to exercise '*oppositional influence*' and avoid the policy compromises required by participation (Strøm, 1984: 211). There is a temporal and contextual element to these orientations, with parties pursuing office in some contexts, policy in others (Harmel & Janda, 1994: 265).

Amidst a system in which many democratic parties are considered catch-all parties, policy-seeking behaviour by parties is under-theorised (Strøm, 1990: 568). Despite the lack of a coherent theory on the subject, all parties, like governments, are obliged to formulate policies (Mair, 1989: 171). New parties are understood to be more policy-oriented, and policy-seeking parties may '*more often than not gave greater priority to articulation or defence of its policies than to either the maximization of votes or securing office*' (Wolinetz, 2006: 151). The primacy of policy-seeking often originates at the party's foundation, Szarka describe it as a '*foundational choice to act as a political party having specific objectives*' (Szarka, 2004: 305)

These goals are interrelated and reflect strategic considerations as well as the broader context in which they take place. Vote-maximisers with specific policy aims may pursue these aims by using votes to secure their entry into office where they can directly influence policy. Alternatively, they may use votesto demonstrate a pressing need for action on a specific policy area (Pedersen, 2012: 2). In a multi-level system, parties may pursue office at one level while seeking the implementation of a policy, through the pursuit of votes, at another level.

The literature on sub-state nationalist parties tends to overlook this model when examining the motivations and behaviour of sub-state nationalist parties, although the dilemma posed by votes, office, and policy orientations has been examined in the case of new right and green parties (see Heinisch, 2003; Alonso, 2012; Minkenberg, 2001). It provides a useful way of understanding both party behavior and conceptions of the party itself. Sub-state nationalist parties are vote-seeking, and indeed *'vote-maximizing'* but may use votes differently than their statewide counterparts(Alonso, 2012). They may be limited by the fact that they campaign only within the boundaries of the nation and may also face limitations in exchanging these votes for office, particularly in a system which has not yet decentralised. Strategically, there may also be limitations on vote-maximizing behaviour; while statewide rivals may move to the centre to capture the maximum number of votes, sub-state nationalist parties may be less likely to compromise on their core self-government goals, which makes them distinct from their political rivals. There is also evidence to suggest that sub-state nationalist parties are less sensitive to electoral defeat than their rivals, at least in regards to their core goals (Adams et al, 2006). Office-seeking behavior may also be limited, particularly in centralized systems or systems in which traditional parties are reluctant to enter into government with a sub-state nationalist party.

At their core, sub-state nationalist parties can be understood as fundamentally policy-seeking, mobilizing around their raison d'être of self-government and pursuing this policy. However, this is not to suggest that parties are not strategic, both in their use of votes in pursuit of their goals, and their emphasis on these goals in the arena of party competition.

The consideration of strategy is particularly relevant to the study of parties of interest to this research – electorally successful parties competing within a democratic context. Parties are not pursuing a pure goal but may instead adapt and modify their goal to reflect the system in which they are operating. Their ability to pursue this goal is dependent on their level of success at the polls. Evidence of this rationality is found in discussions of electoral behaviour, approach towards government, and within the self-government goals themselves. Although the vote maximizing behaviour of sub-state nationalist parties might be naturally limited to those within the territory, and those sharing to a degree the territorial ambitions of the party, parties are expected to behave as strategic actors within an electoral context. Alonso argues that sub-state nationalist parties are not, as sometimes assumed, '*defenders of the eternal flame of national liberation*' but are instead '*vote-maximizing actors in competition with mainstream left-wing and right-wing parties*' (Alonso, 2012). As a result, they will '*take into account the political moves of other players; they evaluate the likely consequences of various actions on the fortunes of their partners and opponents*' (Detterbeck, 2012: 46).

This is evident in a party's positioning on other dimensions of electoral competition, including the left-right dimension. At their origins, sub-state nationalist parties did not generally adopt positions on the ideological spectrum, fearing that they would divide or alienate voters (Newman, 1994; Rovny, 2013). They have done so as their electoral success increased, and have been found at all points on the ideological spectrum (Gomez-Reino et al, 2006; Erk 2005; Erk; 2010; Elias et al, 2015; Alonso, 2012; De Winter, 1998; Guibernau, 1996; Tronconi, 2006). This '*ideological thickening*' (Hepburn, 2009: 489) was motivated by a need to broaden the range of issues on which sub-state nationalist parties competed, often when faced with theprospect of entering into government. This two-dimensional programmatic profile can be understood as a vote-maximizing strategy, combining '*properiphery positions with issues that will attract less aligned voters*' (Alonso, 2012). Parties are rarely innovators, acting in ideological terms as '*intrinsically catch-all parties*' (De Winter, 1998: 223).

Parties are also expected to take positions on the issues of the day, those which transcend ideological divides and introduce new arenas for competition, like globalisation and Europeanisation (Lecours, 2012: 279). '*As parties that aspire to govern one day their respective peripheral territories, they need to show that they are able to address all the problems that worry voters*' (Alonso, 2012). We see this in areas of Europeanisation (Keating, 2008; Hepburn 2008; Hepburn, 2012; Jolly 2007; Hooghe & Marks, 1996; Elias 2000; Dardanelli, 2001), the welfare state (Beland & Lecours, 2006; McEwen, 2006), migration (Banting & Soroka, 2012; Adam, 2013; Barker, 2015; Hepburn & Zapata-Barrero, 2014), and energy and environmental policy (McEwen & Bomberg, 2014). This is a result, in part, of the office-seeking ambitions of these parties, in which they are required to prove that they are a viable and credible party of government, able to mobilise on the basis of self-government but also salient policies.

Entry into government also has strategic implications. Pedersen (2012: 1) describes the realities of coalition, saying '*A party has to moderate its own policy principles in order to join winning coalitions and influence public policy*'. Moving from '*protest to power*' can be an important and risky step in the lifespan of a sub-state nationalist party (Elias and Tronconi, 2011) and a growing body of literature captures the experience of parties in government (See for instance: McAngus, 2015 on Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party, and the 2011 Elias and Tronconi edited collection). Participation in government, either alone or in coalition, enables sub-state nationalist parties to pursue their self-government goals directly rather than through influence on parties in government. Decentralisation in Spain, Belgium, Italy, and the United Kingdom opened up new opportunities for sub-state nationalist parties to pursue government at a level more appropriate to their ambitions (Elias, 2009a: 553). Participation at the sub-state level positions parties to act as the '*official*' defender of the interests of the regions, increasing their profile and allow for negotiations at the centre (Hepburn, 2011: 11).

Participation at the central level may be both more and less appealing for sub-state nationalist parties. The central level serves as the forum in which '*decisions about the reorganization of political authority take place*', but participation here can also be fraught with risk, particularly for junior partners(Elias, 2009a: 553; see also Elias & Tronconi, 2011: 4). Albertazzi and McDonnell (2005: 966) describe the '*eternal dilemma*' of electorally successful regionalist parties faced with the prospect of entry into government, a choice

between retaining purity at the expense of exercising influence, or gaining influence at the risk of losing credibility among supporters. Participation may imply recognition of the legitimacy of the central state which can seem at odds with the self-government goals of a given party (McDonnell & Newell, 2011: 447). As a result, participation is relatively rare, limited to the Lega Nord in Italy, the Volksunie, in the 1970s, and more recently, the entry of the N-VA to federal government following the 2014 elections in Belgium.

A large and growing body of literature examines the approach of sub-state nationalist parties towards European integration, suggesting more creative models of self-government (Beyers & Bursens, 2006; Dardanelli, 2012; Elias, 2011; Hepburn, 2008; Hooghe & Marks, 1996; Jolly, 2006; Keating, 2008). Keating speaks to theinfluence of the external context, identifying a growing tendency towards autonomist demands, representative of a '*consensus on the desirability and legitimacy of limited self-government within the state and broader supranational and transnational orders*' (Keating, 2012: 13). These all suggest an interaction with institutional structures and systems which should be explored in greater detail.

Discussions of will and capacity and the viability of a self-governing unit all suggest that these parties are rational actors (Hechter, 2000: 3). Meadwell (2005) argues political actors may be quite principled, possessing '*prescriptive*' or '*non-instrumental cognitive beliefs*' which would see political borders aligned with national borders, but in order to engage in politics, they '*have to think instrumentally*', assessing the consequences of their moves. Lluch's analysis of visions of sovereignty made an attempt to capture some of these motivations in the case of Catalan and Quebecois nationalist parties. He drew a distinction between instrumental and teleological autonomists, with instrumental autonomists seeing autonomy *'as a valuable vehicle for achieving their self-determination objectives*' while acknowledging that autonomy may be a building block or stepping stone to sovereignty, while teleological autonomists seek autonomy tout court, even when they might make appeals to sovereignty as a negotiating tactic (Lluch, 2014).

Urwin (1992) posits that ideological development may lead to a moderation in goals as parties become aware that '*the promised land would not necessarily be the one of milk and honey*…' suggesting a rational approach to self-government goals that is at the core of this research.

1.3.2 Value and instrumental rationality: the pursuit of self-government

Varshney's (2003) work embodies this sentiment, viewing nationalism as both rational and irrational. In his work, Varshney employs Weber's model of social action – of *value rationality* and *instrumental rationality* – in an attempt to capture both motivation and strategy. Value rationality is derived from an actor's conscious '*ethical, aesthetic, religious or other*' beliefs which exist independently of their prospect for success. These values are constraining, limiting the choices available to nationalist actors. In this case, *'[s]ome spheres or goals of life are considered so valuable that they would not normally be up for sale or compromise, however costly the pursuit of their realisation might be*' (ibid: 86). For example, the belief in the existence of the nation would prohibit actors from supporting the assimilation into the majority group, even under duress. In contrast, *instrumental rationality* comes closer to a rational choice model, with actors engaging in a '*strict cost-benefit calculus with respect to goals, necessitating the abandonment of goals if the costs of realising them are too high*' (ibid: 86).

Both value and instrumental rationality are employed by sub-state nationalist parties – oriented towards the values of nationhood, self-determination, and self-government but also taking into account practical concernswhen assessing the costs and benefits of a given course of action. We see evidence of this in the variation of self-government goals put forth by sub-state nationalist parties, with parties expressing their belief in the existence of the nation and its right to self-determination but seeking different forms of self-government. These goals therefore reflect rational considerations, both internal and external to the party.

Claims for self-government are rooted in value rationality, the belief that the nation requires self-government, and instrumental rationality, with self-government serving a specific purpose. The claim to nationhood and therefore self-government is insufficient, and claims put forward by sub-state nationalist parties suggest self-government will serve a practical purpose (Sambanis & Milanovic, 2014: 4). Sub-state nationalist parties are increasingly policy focused, taking a nationalist position on *'hot topics'* (Lecours, 2012: 279). These include democratic representation, economic prosperity, cultural survival, and social policy (Lecours, 2012; Alonso, 2012; Miller, 1995). The nature of these claims is closely linked with the nature of the grievance identified by a party or movement. These vary, both between parties and over time and can include economic incentives, rooted in

inequalities between the centre and the periphery as well as opportunities available to the sub-state nation (Gellner, 1983; Hechter, 1977; Nairn, 1977; Munoz & Tormos, 2015; Brancati, 2014; Gerard, 2014; Gomez Fortes & Cabeza Perez 2013; Praeger, 1997), conflicts over culture, language, and symbols (Anderson, 1983; Smith, 1998), a history of political independence (Siroky & Cuffe, 2015) and the structure of the state (Breuilly, 1993). These justifications may also centre on specific aspects of social and welfare policy (Beland & Lecours, 2008; Lecours, 2012; McEwen, 2002 and 2006), and concerns about democratic representation (Buchanan, 1998). Other policies have also become a vehicle for sub-state nationalist mobilisation, with parties weighing in new issue areas, which include the environment (McEwen & Bomberg, 2014; Royles & McEwen, 2015; Ross & Jones, 2016) and immigration (Hepburn, 2009; Jeram, 2014; Barker, 2014). These are used as a means of stressing distinctiveness – of the sub-state nationalist party and the nation it claims to represent.

1.3.3 Institutional contexts: ideas and strategy

If we accept the proposition that sub-state nationalist parties arerational and strategic actors, we can argue that the context in which they operate does matter and must be considered. Historical institutionalism represents a productive lens through which sub-state nationalist party goals can be analysed. Lecours (2005: 176) argues that while students of nationalism have not yet fully engaged with trends of new and historical institutionalism, these ideas can be fruitfully employed to strengthen analyses of sub-state nationalism.

The adoption of a historical institutionalist perspective, according to Lecours (2005: 186), does not require the researcher to discount the importance of culture, identity and socioeconomic conditions but allows them to leverage institutions for greater depth of analysis. Broschek's (2015) work on authority migration in multilevel systems employed a historical institutionalist approach, examining the role of ideas and processes in shaping whether centralisation or decentralisation occurred. He states that '*[w]hile actors ultimately are the agents of continuity and change, it is necessary to uncover how they are positioned within man-made, historically established institutional settings that guide their behavior*' (ibid: 7). This approach informs the theoretical framework and research design adopted.

In this research, I draw on principles of historical institutionalism as well as recent strains of discursive institutionalism which emphasises ideational and constructive concepts, in an effort to address some of the weaknesses of rational choice institutionalism. These include a tendency to remove cases from their temporal context and treat them as '*short term, relatively presentist, and closely linked to particularly strategic situations with particular structures of payoff*' (Katznelson & Weingast, 2005). By drawing broadly on new institutionalist models, in what Thelen (1999) describes as '*creative combinations*', we can emphasise and explore the role of '*context, situations, and institutions*' (Katznelson & Weingast, 2005) In the HI view, '*behaviour, attitudes and strategic choices take place inside particular social, political, economic, and even cultural contexts*' (Steinmo, 2008).

Historical institutionalism is defined by its goals, '*explaining real world outcomes, using history as an analytic tool*' (Steinmo, 2008). Historical institutionalists do stress the role played by institutions but also look to socioeconomic factors and the influence of the values, beliefs, and ideas held by the individual actors, developing a framework that accounts for the actor and the context in which they operate (Hall & Taylor, 2006: 946; Ma, 2007: 64). While actors are rational, their rationality is '*bounded*' and preferences change according to context (Nee, 1998; Lecours, 2000: 517). Parties are expected to interpret and respond to the context in which they operate. They may be guided by their sense of how a nationalist party should behave in a given context, responding to proposed state reforms, entering into government, or advancing or rejecting certain policy platforms, according to the '*logic of appropriateness*', in which actors '*seek[s] to fulfil the obligations encapsulated in a role, an identity, a membership in a political community or group*' (March & Olsen, 2011).

This is rooted in ideas and perceptions about the values of the party and the instrumental pursuit of self-government goals. These '*interpretations of the environment*' can shape the behaviour of actors (Hay, 2002: 166). As a result, actors '*contextualize their preferences based on the particular institutional incentives that they face in different settings*' (Thelen, 1999: 376). These interpretations take the form of perceptions, which Deschouwer (1992: 17) describes as the '*intermediate variable*' between '*objective facts and the reactions of the party*' or ideas. By examining the ideas held by sub-state nationalist parties, uncovered through an analysis of their presentation and framing of issues, we can capture the ways in which they operate within a broader system of constraints.

A growing body of work, within both historical institutionalist and discursive institutionalist traditions and elsewhere, seeks to understand the role of ideas. Ideas are considered to be at the heart of political behaviour, shaping action and strategy and contributing to explanations of how actors interpret their world in different contexts (Schmidt 2010: 8). Ideas are defined as '*creative solutions to collective action problems*' or '*creative adaptations that can be evaluated both on rational and emotive grounds*' (Steinmo, 2008). Mehta (2010: 27) argues that ideas can take three forms: firstly, as policy solutions, based on a common definition of the problem and objectives, secondly as problem definitions, or a '*particular way of understanding a complex reality*'; and finally, as public philosophies or zeitgeists. Schmidt, who coined the term discursive institutionalism, considered the fourth '*new*' institutionalist school, describe ideas as the '*substantive content of discourse*', viewed as '*policies, programs, and philosophies*' (Schmidt, 2008: 303). The goal of discursive institutionalism is to go beyond '*politics as usual*' and analyse the politics of change, the role of ideas in shaping political action, and understanding persuasion and deliberation in political discourse (Schmidt, 2010: 2).

By examining discourse, or conducting an analysis of the frames employed by a given actor (a method discussed in detail in the following chapter), we can attempt to understand the way that actors interpret the institutional context in which they operate and are subsequently constrained and empowered. We can assess these *ideas* in light of constitutional, territorial, or ideological constraints and then identify change over time. How do the proposals put forth by sub-state nationalist parties account for both internal and external constraints? How do they reflect the party's past positions? Have they changed in response to crises or times in which change becomes possible?

1.4. The art of the possible: Self-government in light of empirical contexts

Rudolph and Thompson (1985) describe the strategic behaviour of nationalist parties as a result of the '*recognition of the art of the possible*', arguing that they will adapt goals to the current conditions and preference of voters. In keeping with this, I aim to examine the ways in the goals adopted by sub-state nationalist parties reflect this art, a combination of two key considerations – the party's commitment to the value rational principle that a nation should have self-government, discussed in detail in the preceding section, and instrumental considerations of the institutional context, of which there are three. The

selection of these three institutional contexts reflects, perhaps, a broad approach to institutions, in order to capture the multi-faceted nature of self-government. These can be understood as political opportunity structures, or '*elements in the environment [that] impose certain constraints on political activity or open avenues for it*' (Eisinger, 1973). These instrumental considerations, or empirical contexts, take three forms: (1) the international arena in which this self-governing entity would operate; (2) the structure and response of the embedding state to sub-state nationalist demands; and (3) the electoral and party context in which these goals are pursued.

In this research, I don't make assumptions about the directionality of the conditions but instead seek to understand how sub-state nationalist parties understand and frame their self-government goals in light of these institutional context. Here, I discuss the literature on each of these conditions and identify areas of interest which are explored in the empirical research which follows.

1) Self-government, Europe, and the world

Rokkan and Urwin (1982: 120) describe the need to consider sub-state nationalism with reference to political, economic, and cultural concerns but also '*against a backdrop of the geoethnic, geopolitical and geoeconomic heritage of the continent*'. Both claims for internal and external self-government are increasingly made with reference to the international, and for the case of European nations, the European sphere (Keating, 1992; Beyers & Bursens, 2006; Dardanelli, 2011; Elias, 2008; Elias, 2011; Hepburn, 2008; Hooghe & Marks, 1996; Jolly, 2006; Keating, 2008; Gomez-Reino, 2014). This is seen in the Spanish autonomous communities (Tierney, 2005: 172); the goals of the Parti Quebecois which stress continental integration (Paquin, 2016; Martin, 1995), and in the cases of interest to this research. The growth of paradiplomatic activity by sub-state actors also suggests a growing interest in the international sphere, even if independent statehood is not the end goal (Keating 1999; Lecours 2002; Blatter et al 2009; Paquin and Lachapelle, 2005). In this section, I will explore the relationship between self-government goals and the international context more generally, before focusing on the European project, and the uses of Europe by sub-state nationalist parties.

Sub-state nationalist parties, whether seeking internal or external self-government, are expected to engage with the international context – defined broadly to encompass

international tendencies, globalisation, and supranational integration. These include, in the 1950s and 1960s, processes of decolonisation (Connor, 1994) and more recent processes of political and economic globalisation and integration. Globalization is understood by political actors as '*a set of external economic constraints with attendant political imperatives*' (Hay & Rosamond, 2002; 147). In material terms, globalisation can be conceptualised as the idea that '*the world is being rapidly molded into a shared social space by economic and technological forces and that developments in one region can have profound consequences on the other side of the globe*' (Held et al, 1999: 1). This phenomenon has become a key referent of contemporary political discourse and, increasingly, a lens through which policy-makers view the context in which they find themselves (Hay & Rosamund, 2008: 148). Sub-state nationalist parties are no different – required to engage with both the concept and material realities of processes of globalisation. (Kreisi et al, 2008; Haupt, 2010).

The emergence of sub-state nationalist parties in the 1960s and 1970s, and their claims for self-government, was considered by some, notably Hobsbawm (1990) to be a reaction against modernity and globalisation. Both support for integration more broadly, and particularly at the European level is, even now, described as a '*paradox*' suggesting that these are contrary phenomenon (Connolly, 2013; Delanty, 2006). However, there is an acknowledgement that international integration and sub-state nationalist mobilisation might be parallel processes, and sub-state nationalist parties, like their traditional counterparts, are actively engaged with these concepts and constraints. Globalisation and calls for self-government are interrelated, and taken together can be understood as '*encouraging minorities to explore new possibilities for autonomy within the emerging global order*' (Keating & McGarry, 2001).

There is a debate within the literature on whether globalisation serves as a constraint for sub-state nationalist parties or an enabler. In some views, globalization, with the removal of borders, and political and economic cooperation, statehood becomes more accessible as the competences of the state decrease (Keating, 1992: 50; Meadwell & Martin, 1996: 75; Alesina and Spolaore, 1997: 1042). Free trade agreements and international cooperation render independence less costly. (Keating, 2001: 30-1, in Keating & McGarry). Alternatively, the changing nature of statehood makes the achievement of statehood less important, viewed as unnecessary for the pursuit of self-government goals (Keating, 2012: 14). Meadwell and Martin (1996: 74–5) argue that, from an economic

perspective, freer trade lowers the barrier to secession, making it more likely while Brancati (2014) counters that the economic benefits of integration are not universal.

Keating (2001) outlines three possible responses of sub-state nationalist parties to the growing influence of supranational and transnational forces and the apparent decline of the state – those who feel enabled, those who feel constrained, and those who modify their goals. For those who feel enabled, growing integration is viewed as a means of externalising some of the costs of independent statehood. For the second group, transnational and supranational developments are viewed as constraining. Taking into account geography, size, and economic viability, this group may eschew independence and foresee a continued relationship with the larger state, seeing limitations in political independence. For the third group – the focus of Keating's work - the realities of the post-sovereign world are accepted and negotiated. This group focuses on maximizing influence and autonomy rather than seeking formal recognition of their status or the '*trappings of sovereignty*' (Keating, 2001). This is particularly pronounced within a European context, described as a *'possible microcosm of globalization*' and having an effect on both its member states and the aspirations of sub-state nationalist parties mobilising within them (Weber, 1995: 4).

Whether in favour or against European integration, the issue is '*highly significant'* as it '*modifies the very definition of territorial conflict and the very structure of political opportunities for these parties*' (De Winter and Cachafeiro, 2002: 485). We can see a shift over time in approaches to European integration. In its early years, the European Economic Community was met with some scepticism by sub-state nationalist parties, understood as a threat to cultural identities and yet another forum in which sub-state nations would struggle to find a voice (Hepburn, 2008: 547; Jolly, 2015: 81; Lynch, 1996). The 1980s gave rise to the idea of Europe as a potential avenue for representation of sub-state national communities, both within existing member states and as independent entities, enabled by the '*Europe of the Regions*' (Hepburn, 2008: 548; De Winter, 1998: 208; Hix and Lord 1997: 27). Once a source of concern, Europe was now considered a '*new ally in the quest for territorial autonomy*' for sub-state nationalist parties and Elias argues that the party family is on the whole quite pro-European (Elias, 2009b: 1-3). Lynch described *'autonomy and European integration*' as '*intertwined*' (Lynch, 1996: 197). De Winter's 1998 classification of parties according to their self-government goals included the European federalist parties, which saw their

future within an increasingly integrated European context (De Winter, 1998: 205). Although this was a brief period, it was important in the ideational development of the parties, presenting a challenge to traditional understandings of statehood and demonstrating potential for external support for self-government (Lynch, 1996; Elias, 2008: 563). Despite the failure of the Europe of the Regions to materialise, most sub-state nationalist parties still '*see the future of their nations firmly placed within the EU*', whether as an independent member state or a political unit with significant autonomy (Hoppe, 2007: 68)

The European Union can thus be understood as both an enabling force, by lowering the economic and political costs of self-government, particularly political independence, or rendering it unnecessary by calling '*into question the whole idea of the sovereign, territorially-bounded, and exclusive nationstate*' (Keating, 2013: 11, see also Lecours, 2012; Broschek, 2012). Jolly (2015) describes the potential views of parties, saying '*Regionalists, resentful of centralization and threats of homogenization, could perceive a deeper European Union either as yet another threat to their culture or as an ally in their broader bargaining game with the state'*.Factors which might enable or facilitate calls for self-government include the externalisation of many of the difficult questions, particularly for those parties seeing independence, allowing for free trade and coordination on defence.. On a pragmatic level, supranational organisations like the EU can be seen as a safety net (Schrijver, 2006: 28). The structure of the European Union, which remains, despite efforts by sub-state nationalist parties, dominated by member states, might also encourage the adoption of political independence demands as the only way to access decision-making at the European level (Laible; 2008; De Winter & Cachafeiro, 2002: 489). Conversely, the European Union may make self-government seem less pressing or relevant in an increasingly interdependent age (Meguid, 2014: 103).

The large and growing literature explains positions on Europe and captures the strategic use of the European context, but does not, sufficiently capture the effect of European integration on the self-government goals themselves. Whether considered enabling or constraining, the European context has shaped the self-government goals of sub-state nationalist parties, providing an '*alternative framework for developing the territorial project*' (Hepburn, 2010: 9, see also Elias, 2009b: 2). As a result, '*Flemish, Scottish, and Catalan nationalists have tethered the traditional goal of sovereign statehood to the realities of an integrating Europe in which state sovereignty is constrained*' (Connolly, 2013). These changes at the European level are likely to have an effect on the self-government goals advanced by sub-state nationalist

parties and the ways in which European integration and the European Union are engaged with and incorporated within the self-government goals of parties is of interest in this research.

2) Self-government and the state

The second institutional context of interest is the state. The state is defined as a '*complex set of institutional arrangements for rule operating through a continuous and regulated activities and individuals acting as occupants of office*' (Poggi, 1978: 1). Although the strength and sustainability of the modern state has been questioned, it remains a central reference point, for both statewide actors and sub-state nationalist parties (Keating, 1992: 45). The state is understood as '*contribut[ing] to a larger discourse that delineates what decision-makers can legitimately conceive of as politically feasible policy alternatives*' (Anderson 2007: 190, see also Clemens & Cook, 1998: 458). The centrality of the state is evident in Rokkan and Urwin's (1982: 142) definition of a sub-state nationalist party's goals as '*the relationship between the periphery in question and the core of the state after the conflict has been resolved, as perceived by the movement'*, with similar sentiments expressed by Mikesell and Murphy who argue that '*no historical discussion of minority-group movements is possible without reference to state actions and reactions*' (1991: 587).

Parties are likely to look to the state as one point of reference: defining the realm of what is possible and what is desirable in the context of what is available or likely to be offered by the centre. In this section, I will address three key components of self-government and the state: (1) the historical and contemporary relationship between the state and the nation, employed in justifying a party's self-government campaign; (2) the sub-state nationalist party and its response to proposed and realised decentralisation; and (3) the relationship between the state and the nation in the event of radical self-government or independence.

The nature of the state, particularly its development and ongoing relationships with the sub-state, may influence the self-government goals adopted by a sub-state nationalist party (Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Hechter, 2000). The rise of the modern state and its extension of competences is often referenced as parallel and interrelated with the rise of sub-state nationalism. Sub-state nationalism '*both shapes and attempts to cope with the rise of the modern state*' (Guibernau, 1996: 46). In Western Europe, the expansion of the state in the

post-war period and the state's transformation from '*night-watchman states*' with primary responsibility for security, defence, and domestic policy, to welfare states which exercised greater influence in the lives of their populations and contributed to sub-state nationalist demands (Nullmeier & Kaufmann, 2010: 81; Urwin, 1992; Hechter, 2000; Evans, 1996). Sub-state nationalist parties protested this centralisation, arguing it failed to take into account the needs and interests of sub-state nations, neglecting them in favour of the whole (Bogdanor, 1981: 286). Lipset and Rokkan (1967: 14) describe the reactions of '*peripheral regions, linguistic minorities and culturally threatened populations to the pressures of the centralizing, standardizing, and 'rationalizing' machinery of the nation-state*'. The global economic crisis of the 1970s challenged the ability of the state to manage the economy and exacerbated concerns among sub-state nationalists that their interests were neglected (Nullmeier & Kaufmann, 2010: 81; Castles et al, 2010: 6; Urwin, 1992). Subsequent developments, particularly in Western Europe, which challenged traditional understandings of state sovereignty, further exacerbated this crisis of legitimacy. The role of the state appears, at times, diminished, subsumed into the post-sovereign world (Keating, 2012; Tierney, 2005: 162; Keating & McGarry 2001). Sub-state nationalist parties considered this, with the changing nature of the state manifesting the the framing of their goals.

Western states have transformed from above and below – in their capacities, their roles, and in their state structure (Elazar, 1987: 225; Swenden & Maddens, 2009: 1; Keating, 1992: 50). Marks, Hooghe and Schakel's (2008) analysis indicates that generally over the past 50 years, states have undergone processes of decentralisation. This decentralisation accelerated further after 1970 (Rodden, 2004; Hough & Jeffery, 2006). Falleti's definition of decentralisation is employed here, as '*a process of state reform composed by a set of public policies that transfer responsibilities, resources, or authority from higher to lower levels of government in the context of a specific type of state*' (Falleti, 2005: 328–9). Decentralisation was motivated by several factors, including an understanding that this presented an opportunity for elites to transfer responsibility to a sub-state level of government and offload policy problems, a desire to respond to public opinion, or to attempt to neutralise the threat posed by sub-state nationalist parties (Hopkin, 2003: 220; Rokkan & Urwin, 1982: 132; O'Neill, 2003: 1075; Swenden, 2006: 148).

This process of '*political restructuring*' has shaped the opportunities available to sub-state nationalist parties (Bartolini 2005). However, the directionality, or whether decentralisation is enabling or constraining, is contested in the literature (Rokkan & Urwin, 1982: 144; Rudolph & Thompson, 1985: 299). This comes out most explicitly when one considers the '*paradox of federalism*' (Erk & Anderson, 2009) in which federal political arrangements can be considered as either inhibiting or inducing secession. It is also relevant to more general processes of decentralisation, or what Alonso (2012) describes as the '*paradox of devolution*' in which devolution '*is intended to appease the secessionist threat, (but) it also offers peripheral parties the instruments to push it ahead*'. Parties can be accommodated by reforms or invigorated by their failure, in the view of the party, to go far enough (Stefuriuc, 2013; Alonso, 2012). Rokkan and Urwin argue that sub-state nationalist parties will escalate their goals to ensure their political survival, moving up the '*pyramid of independence*' (1982: 144). Each of these arguments will be addressed in turn.

Decentralisation, carried out by the central state, can be understood as a means of allowing some degree of self-government while maintaining the territorial integrity of the central state (Stepan, 2005: 21). Decentralisation or territorial reorganisation to allow for a degree of autonomy or self-government by sub-state nations, is an attempt to '*accommodate the demands and defuse them within existing boundaries*' (Rokkan & Urwin, 1982: 179). Keating defines these efforts as '*territorial management*', '*the efforts of central elites to cope with the territorial dimension of policy problems and to contain territorially based challenges to the central power structure*' (Keating 1988: 18). This accommodative strategy can pose a challenge for sub-state nationalist parties, who must decide whether to accept or reject these proposals and who may face increasing party competition on the issue (Alonso, 2012; Levi & Hechter, 1985: 141; Elias & Tronconi, 2011: 19). The response to these proposals may depend on the self-government goals held by the individual party, whether more or less radical and the perception, by the sub-state nationalist party, of whether decentralisation would strengthen or undermine the pursuit of their goals (Massetti & Schakel, 2013).

Alternatively, decentralisation can be considered a concession, a victory by sub-state nationalist parties – cementing their ownership of a self-government issue and providing the tools by which further self-government can be pursued. Often thought of as a means of neutralizing sub-state nationalist parties by '*giv[ing] them a little so as to better disarm them*' (Bogdanor, 1999: 194), decentralisation can have unintended consequences, fuelling

demands for more. Connor warned that ethno-nationalist movements may gain support in the face of adversity, or denial of the legitimacy of the claims by the centre, he also notes that '*it also appears to feed on concessions*' (1973: 21). Governments are conscious of this perceived threat to territorial integrity and often register their resistance to decentralisation by arguing that concessions might be exploited by sub-state nationalist parties, becoming '*the thin end of a wedge that would sooner or later – but inevitably – lead to independence*' (Urwin, 1982)

This occurs in three ways. Firstly, the accommodation of demands can bolster the sub-state nationalist party cause, legitimising both their role as the party speaking on behalf of the nation and the legitimacy of self-government goals (Alonso, 2012: 245-6; Falletti, 2005: 331; Connor 1973: 21). '*Political decentralisation is likely to produce a policy ratchet effect…a group of supporters who will continue to push in the direction of further decentralisation*' (Falleti, 2005: 331). Secondly, the introduction of institutions, even those with limited capacity, supports a narrative of distinctiveness (Detterbeck, 2012: 34; Hepburn, 2010: 28). These institutions may provide a psychological boost, reinforcing confidence in '*their ability to go it alone*' (Kymlicka, 1998: 137). Speaking specifically of federalism but applicable to other models of decentralisation, Brubaker (1996) explains the psychological function, as sub-state nations gain '*many of the accoutrements of real states*', they are encouraged to think and act accordingly. It may also freeze or institutionalize divisions between the centre and the periphery (Erk & Anderson, 2009: 192). Finally, and in very practical terms, the introduction of self-governing institutions provides the institutional levers through which self-government can be pursued (McGarry & O'Leary, 2009: 6; Sorens, 2009: 255). This is most typically understood in regards to political independence or processes of secession, but can be applied more generally. For sub-state nationalist parties operating within the decentralized context, the opportunities for them to enter into government are increased (Brancati, 2006: 652; Deschouwer, 2003: 215; Massetti & Schakel, 2013). Once there, the ability to act as state in waiting, or an '*aspirant state*' (Beasley & Kaarbo, 2017) and negotiate further concessions or exit from the state is increased.

This literature contributes to our understanding of the causes of sub-state nationalist mobilisation and party strategy in response to decentralisation, but largely fails to capture another important context – the role and relationship between the sub-state nation and the embedding state once the party's self-government goal has been achieved. Keating

hints at this, with discussions of visions of political independence which '*often expose the continuing costs, as independence advocates seek to retain the useful bits of the old state structure*' (Keating, 2012: 13). Lluch's (2014: 151) distinction between pactists and principled independentist parties, discussed above, can be understood as a reflection of this. McEwen's (2013) concept of *embedded independence*, developed with reference to the Scottish National Party, captures a similar phenomenon, with the SNP proposing the maintenance of several key unions in the event of independence. These goals are likely to be rooted in the party's understanding of the relationship between the embedding state and the sub-state nation, the perceived amenability of the central state to continued partnership, and the presence or absence of a supporting structure which would facilitate such relationships, like the European Union.

3) Self-government and the party system

Self-government goals are developed and articulated with reference to the international context and the state structure but are pursued, for the parties of interest to this research, within the context of the party system and through party competition. As discussed in section 1.3, I consider sub-state nationalist parties as rational, strategic actors, and this strategy is illustrated by the party's approach to electoral competition. Sub-state nationalist parties are actors within party systems, behaving strategically in pursuit of their goals and therefore subject to the domain of what Sorens (2008) describes as normal politics. As strategic actors, sub-state nationalist parties '*take into account the political moves of other players; they evaluate the likely consequences of various actions on the fortunes of their partners and opponents*' (Detterbeck, 2012: 46). The structure and internal dynamics of the party system may impact both their behaviour in pursuit of goals and self-government goals themselves (Beland & Lecours, 2005: 678).

The party system, as defined by Sartori (1976) is a '*system of interaction between political parties*', in which '*political parties do not make changes in a vacuum; change often comes in anticipation of, or in reaction to, changes that other political parties in the system make*', a definition which stresses interaction and interdependence. Party systems, Rokkan and Urwin (1982: 167) stress '*are not immutable*', and the entry and success of sub-state nationalist parties to these systems has an impact on both the traditional parties and the sub-state nationalist parties themselves.

The literature on sub-state nationalist parties and party competition is large and continues to grow, with contributions on the ideological dimension of sub-state nationalist party competition (Rovny, 2012; Massetti & Schakel, 2015; Massetti, 2009; Newman 1997; Basile, 2015; Alonso et al, 2015; Erk, 2010); the nature of competition between traditional parties and sub-state nationalist parties (Basile, 2015; Alonso, 2012; Fabre & Swenden, 2013); competition in multilevel elections (Elias, 2011; Detterbeck, 2012; Libbrecht et al, 2013); and the participation of sub-state nationalist parties in government (Field, 2014; Tronconi, 2015; McAngus, 2015; Stefuriuc, 2012). While these represent important contributions to our understanding of the party system, it is also worth analysing how a party sees itself and its self-government goals in light of the party system in which it competes, and this will be the focus of my analysis. .

Several elements of interest have been identified, including the sub-state nationalist party's understanding and positioning of itself vis-à-vis the sub-state nation, self-government, and the party system and its approach towards its political competitors, especially in light of decentralisation which challenges the ability of sub-state nationalist parties to credibly claim to be the only party speaking on behalf of the nation. Also of interest is a party's understanding of its Sartorian relevance, in the form of the use of blackmail or entry into coalition in pursuit of its goals. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Sub-state nationalist parties portray themselves, with varying degrees of credibility, as the defender of the nation and the medium through which self-government can be pursued. The party's understanding of its own role within the system and vis-à-vis self-government is evident in claims to represent the interests of a specific community or nation (Hepburn, 2000) and in its claims to secure self-government for that group.

Sub-state nationalist parties have influence on the party system in which they compete and are, in turn, influenced by the actions of its political rivals. Changes in the party system, including the rise and fall of traditional parties, the emergence of sub-state nationalist competitors, and the adoption of platforms of decentralisation by rivals can have an impact on sub-state nationalist parties and their goals. Decentralisation is considered the most dramatic change – providing both challenges and opportunities to sub-state nationalist parties, and the bulk of my discussion will focus on its effect on the party system and the parties operating within it.

Sub-state nationalist parties, as distinct from broader movements, have pursued an explicitly electoral strategy in the pursuit of their self-government goals. However, their success at their origins was limited, statewide parties largely ignored the sub-state nationalist agenda until a series of high-profile electoral successes signalled public interest in a greater level of autonomy, allowing them to cross the threshold of relevance (Hopkin, 2003: 228; Von Beyme, 1996: 149). Meguid's (2008) work examines the ways in which traditional political actors and emergent parties interact, suggesting that traditional actors engage in dismissive, accommodative, or adversarial strategies in response to the emergence of niche parties. While the notion of sub-state nationalist parties as niche is heavily contested, this framework is useful for understanding the interaction between sub-state nationalist parties, who mobilise around different issues, and their traditional competitors.

While decentralization was discussed in the preceding section in light of the institutions of the state, it can also be analysed through the lens of party system interactions. The motivations of statewide parties in adopting a platform of decentralisation have been well documented (See for instance O'Neill, 2003; Sorens, 2008, Fabre & Swenden, 2013; Detterbeck, 2012; Fabre, 2008; Hopkin & Van Houten, 2009; Maddens & Libbrecht, 2009; Meguid, 2008) and most of these contributions argue that a decision to decentralise is a rational choice, motivated by concerns over electoral prospects (Hepburn, 2010: 31; Toubeau & Wagner, 2016).

Decentralisation has a significant effect on the party system and the actions of both traditional and sub-state nationalist parties operating within it (Elias, 2011; Swenden & Maddens, 2009: 6). Rather than reducing the salience of the issue, this process of decentralisation is expected to introduce or amplify the territorial dimension of electoral politics by allowing sub-state nationalist parties a platform to advance their goals and encouraging the reorientation of statewide parties towards the sub-state level (Hopkin, 2003). Decentralisation can lead to the nationalisation or regionalisation of a given party system (Hepburn, 2010: 31). This involves *'the development of distinct territorial identities and the transformation of politics into nationalist politics*' (Lecours, 2005: 184). The success of sub-state nationalist parties, either indirectly or directly, in securing a degree of self-government for the nation, requires an adaptation, by both sub-state nationalist and statewide parties (Elias, 2011; Swenden & Maddens, 2009: 6). For traditional parties, this entails a

reorientation, often electoral and organizational, towards the sub-state level. While in a centralized state, statewide parties face challenges in credibly claiming support for a regionalist agenda, the introduction of region or sub-state levels of government increases the degree to which parties may be accountable and responsible to the sub-state areas but also enhances the credibility of the statewide party's claim to advance what Alonso (2012) calls a '*pro-periphery agenda*'. For sub-state nationalist parties, this presents an opportunity to present themselves as a party of regional government rather than a source of opposition at the centre (Deschouwer, 2003: 215). This requires a new strategy and may render party competition more difficult, as they are no longer the only actors '*constructing the sub-state nation or region, claiming to protect regional interests, or demanding concessions or autonomy from the state*' (Hepburn, 2010: 6). Levi and Hechter (1985) argue that this might contribute to the decline of sub-state nationalist parties.

However, sub-state nationalist parties have proved resilient in the face of decentralisation and are now normal participants in decentralized systems and decentralisation provides further opportunities for parties to pursue their self-government goals (Belanger, 2003: 550-1). The party's role in government – as majority, minority, or junior partner in coalition may shape its positioning. Bolleyer (2008: 26) and Deschouwer (2008: 18) posit that some sort of moderation on the self-government goal might be required in order to participate in coalition. Government can be employed in multiple ways – to pursue self-government directly, through the use of referendums or declarations in favour of self-government or indirectly, through processes of nation-building. Participation in government at the sub-state level, whether alone or in coalition, positions parties to act as the '*official*' defender of the interest of their regions, which can increase their profile and allow for negotiations from the centre (Hepburn, 2011: 11). The sub-state nationalist party as a party of government is closely linked with decentralisation, as participation in government at the centre is relatively rare, restricted to the Volksunie, the Lega Nord, and since 2014, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. However, parties can often play an influential role from outside of government, particularly in multi-party systems (Field & Hamman, 2015; Brancati, 2005). The participation of regional parties can negatively influence government stability as their demands may be more difficult to accommodate than demands made by other, smaller parties (Brancati, 2005: 144).

While the existing literature has increased our understanding of the strategic behaviour of sub-state nationalist parties within the party system, the attention paid to the impact of party competition on the self-government goals of these parties is more limited. There are some hints that increasing competition, from both statewide and nationalist competitors, might lead to radicalisation on the self-government dimension or at least make a strategy of moderation more difficult (Alonso, 2012; Brancati, 2005). Elias argues that when statewide party strategies threaten the electoral position of the sub-state nationalist parties, the latter shift their position, whether through moderating or radicalising their demands. They might also focus on other policy priorities, chiefly on the left-right dimension (Elias, 2011: 7). Prospective or realised entry into government might also lead to an increased or decreased salience of self-government goals, with parties either seeking to capitalise on their issue ownership or position themselves as a party of responsible government.

4) The art of the possible: a framework for analysing self-government goals

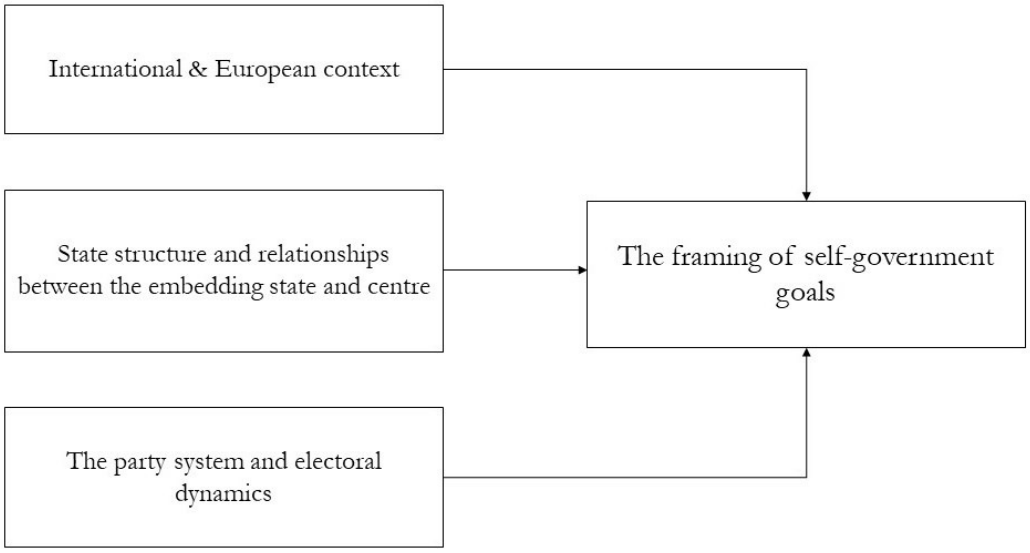
While a large and growing literature on sub-state nationalist parties addresses the individual effects of international integration, the state structure, and the interaction of sub-state nationalist parties within their respective party system, this research represents a systematic attempt to analyse self-government in light of these institutional constraints. Each empirical context is clearly important, when we look to its development in the literature, but this largely focuses on behaviour, and does not always capture the ways in which self-government goals might be changed and adapted to reflect changes in contexts external to the party. As a result, I seek to understand how self-government goals reflect the '*art of the possible*', the interaction between a fundamental belief in self-government (defined broadly to include both internal and external forms), motivated by value rationality, and empirical contexts - instrumental concerns which impact the form and feasibility of self-government.

I begin with an assumption that underpins this research, that sub-state nationalist parties possess a *pure goal of self-government*, a preference that takes into account Varshney's (2003) value rationality. Varshney builds on the definition of Weber, arguing that value-rational behaviour is produced by a certain set of beliefs, *'ethical, aesthetic, religious or other'* which exist independently of their prospects for success. In the context of this research, this can

be understood as a link between the existence of the nation and the need for that nation to achieve self-government. This is clearly a simplification, with the positions of parties always representing both values and instrumental considerations but it is helpful in understanding the relationship between goals and empirical contexts and therefore, the mechanism of interest to this research.

I then assume that sub-state nationalist parties are strategic actors, taking into account the opportunities and constraints in the system in which they operate as well internal factors impacting the feasibility of a given self-government goal. Therefore, the outcome of this, the self-government goal of a sub-state nationalist party at any point in time, reflects the art of the possible - what is feasible given factors internal to the nation (size, economy, demographics) and those factors external to the nation, what I define as *empirical contexts*: the international, and particularly the European arena, the structure and the response of the state, and the structure and composition of the party system in which it operates.

Theoretical Framework



In this research, I set out some initial expectations (section 2.1.3) but do not adopt strict hypotheses to be tested, as the goal of this research is not to identify the exact degree to which changes in the party system, state structure, or external environment might spur

changes in the self-government goals put forth by a given party. Rather, I explore how these contexts shape and constrain the articulation and strategic pursuit of a party's self-government goals. I've adopted what Bennett and Elman (2006) call a '*causes-of-effects*' approach appropriate to qualitative research. This approach recognises '*all parts are mutually constitutive and interconnected within a given case*' (Ragin, 2000: 27) and, therefore, no single cause has an independent impact on the outcome (Rihoux and Ragin, 2008: 9).

The literature on sub-state nationalist parties largely focuses on the way that the empirical contexts impact the behaviour of sub-state nationalist movements – how they behave at a European level, how they operate within decentralized system, and how they compete within a party system. What this research seeks to do is unpack how these contexts – whether international, the state, or the party system – shape the self-government goals of sub-state nationalist parties. The self-government goals themselves form the object of analysis. The literature is strongest when it comes to the international context, with discussions of '*post-sovereignty*' (Keating, 2012) and '*qualified independence*' (2007: 54) and in response to the structure of the state, with McEwen's (2013) discussion of embedded independence and Lluch's (2014) distinction between pactists and principled independentists, but has largely overlooked the way self-government is discussed within a multi-dimensional space.

This is a difficult relationship to establish directly and these factors are closely interlinked. Decentralisation has a direct impact on the structure of the party system and dynamics at the international level may have an impact on the structure and capacities of the state. As a result, it is difficult to disentangle a causal relationship between these factors and the self-government goals put forth by sub-state nationalist parties. However, we can examine the ideational influence that these factors have had on sub-state nationalist parties and their goals, by examining how parties frame their self-government goals in light of these conditions. In doing so, I rely on the analysis of the party's public statements and discourse, drawing inspiration from both historical and discursive institutionalist toolboxes. Here it is important to examine changes in the empirical contexts and the content and articulation of self-government goals, and as a result, I adopt a longitudinal approach, discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter Two: Research Design and methodology

In the previous chapter, I set out my understanding of sub-state nationalist parties and their self-government goals and examined factors which are expected to impact the content and framing of these goals. In this chapter, I will present the research design and methods which underpin this research. I argue throughout that rather than reflect an ambition based on the intrinsic link between nationhood and statehood, the self-government goals articulated by sub-state nationalist parties represents the '*art of the possible*' or a reflection of strategic considerations of opportunities and risks present in the context in which a party competes. This work therefore derives inspiration from historical institutionalist traditions. Broadly, I ask the following questions: *What do sub-state nationalist parties want? How do sub-state nationalist parties frame self-government? And how do they do so in light of three empirical contexts considered in this research: international and European integration, state structures, and party systems?*

To enhance the empirical richness of this research, I adopt a cross-national and longitudinal approach, examining three sub-state nationalist parties within two sub-state nations from their origins through 2014, or in the case of the Volksunie, from its origins to demise in 2001. The cases selected for comparison are the Scottish National Party and the Volksunie, and its successor, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. The focus on self-government goals advanced by sub-state nationalist parties necessitated close scrutiny of primary party literature, and a broad array of documentary sources including speeches, public statements, and media accounts, totalling more than 400 discrete documents. This was supplemented by a small number of interviews with prominent party representatives. Data was analysed qualitatively, using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, specifically NVivo. In doing so, I employ framing analysis to identify and explore the construction of claims in favour of self-government.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the unit of analysis, the sub-state nationalist party and the empirical contexts of interest in this research, before turning specifically to my research design, including the use of comparison and the case selection. Finally, I will set out my data collection and method of analysis, presenting my schema of framing self-government

2.1 Sub-state nationalist parties and empirical contexts

In the preceding chapter, I've examined the nature of self-government goals and discussed the literature on international and European integration, state reform, and electoral competition and sub-state nationalist parties. Before discussing my case selection and research design, I will first touch on two components of this research: the sub-state nationalist party as a unit of analysis and the nature and relevance of the empirical contexts in which these goals are expressed, and which are expected to shape the party's articulation of their goals. A series of expectations on the ways in which these empirical contexts may interact with self-government goals is set out in this section.

2.1.1 Sub-state nationalist parties as the unit of analysis

While I will situate the party in the context of the party system, region, and state, I will look specifically at the party as the primary unit of analysis. Parties have long been used as units of analysis in political science but the idea that a single theory of parties is desirable or even possible has been contested by scholars (Gunther et al 2002).

Parties have been selected as the unit of analysis for three reasons. Firstly, parties as organisations are expected to advance a coherent self-government goal, defined as their raison d'être, in contrast to movements, which may contain multiple goals. This is, of course, a simplification, with factions and individuals who make up these parties, holding different goals and strategies for the achievement of these goals. Self-government goals also often sit alongside other policy goals. But in each case at a given point in time, a prevalent self-government goal can be identified. We can, as a result, trace these goals over time. From a practical perspective, parties, unlike movements, have produced a coherent body of artefacts or data in the form of manifestos, campaign materials, consultation documents, and internal reports. Secondly, they, like all parties, are expected to be strategic actors, shaped by and shaping the context in which they operate (Urwin, 1992; Alonso, 2012; Detterbeck, 2012: 46). This includes the electoral domain but also their interactions with ideas and institutions within and beyond the state. Their behaviour is likely to be shaped by concerns over their survival and their pursuit of goals. Finally, sub-state nationalist parties provide a case, or a distinct unit of analysis, which can be studied in detail (George & Bennett, 2005: 17-8).

2.1.3 Empirical contexts and expectations

Of interest to this research is the interaction between external, empirical contexts and the self-government goals articulated by the party, which can be viewed as political opportunity structures available to the party. These include social, political, and economic contexts which Hay describes as '*densely structured and highly contoured*' (2002: 209). The international environment, the state structure, and the party system are viewed through the eyes of political actors, and their interpretation of these structures will shape goals and pursuit of these goals. Changes have been identified in each of these contexts, with the progression of globalisation and Europeanisation, a widespread tendency towards decentralisation in Western democracies as well as direct state responses to sub-state nationalist mobilisation, and shifts in electoral competition and party systems. I expect a relationship to exist between these external contexts and the framing of self-government.

Together, these empirical contexts are expected to interact with and influence the framing of self-government goals. Some parties may be particularly sensitive to the demands of electoral competition, and shifts to the structure of party competition may trigger changes, whilst others may be more sensitive to shifts in the state structure or larger external contexts. However, these contextual factors do not reflect an objective reality but rely on the interpretation of the actors themselves. Parties may respond to similar stimuli, i.e. the nationalisation of the party system, state reform, or a global economic crisis in very different ways, reflecting their perceptions of opportunities, threats and the responses available to them. These changes will be unpacked and examined through the use of framing analysis, a qualitative technique that will be discussed in greater detail below.

International and European dynamics: I expect self-government goals to be framed with reference to the international and European contexts. I don't make hypotheses as to the directionality of this relationship – as discussed in the preceding chapter, sub-state nationalist take a variety of position on globalisation and Europeanisation, perceiving it as a threat to self-government or as an enabler. But I do expect parties to respond to developments at the European level and frame their goals in light of these developments. Parties may accord different salience to the external context, and this will be shaped by their self-government goal. Those which purse an internal self-government goal, seeking enhanced authority within the existing state, may pay less attention to issues of European or international importance. In contrast, parties seeking external self-government are

expected to pay more attention to the external context in which these goals are to be achieved. Key events of interest include the development of the European project, the rise and subsequent fall of the Europe of the regions and the Euro crisis.

State structures: Sub-state nationalism is a reaction against the status of the national community within the existing state structure. Self-government goals are expected to be articulated with reference to the state. This is true of internal self-government goals, which seek accommodation within the existing state, and external self-government goals, which seek exit from that state. Three key components are of interest here: the way in which the nature of the state contributes to self-government goals, understandings of its structure, and proposed changes to that structure, either in response to administrative efforts to decentralise or in response to mobilisation by sub-state nationalist parties. I expect processes of decentralization, federalisation, or devolution to shape the self-government goals of sub-state nationalist parties, whether they are viewed as an obstacle on the path to self-government by undercutting nationalist demands, or as a stepping stone from which further appeals can be launched. Decentralisation is considered to be a process rather than an event.

Electoral competition and the party system: For the parties of interest to this research, those pursuing their self-government goals through peaceful, democratic, and electoral means, self-government goals are articulated in an electoral context. Parties must advance their goals by securing support from voters and self-government goals are shaped by what is feasible in a party system context. Therefore, the structure of electoral competition and the party system is expected to influence the framing of self-government goals. This is expected to manifest in two key ways: the way in which the party frames itself as a driver of self-government and the way it frames its approach to self-government, stressing its relevance, whether as a blackmail actor as a party of prospective government.

An analysis of change is implicit in this research, seeking to understand the ways in which changes external to the party may contribute to changes in the framing of self-government goals. This underlines the benefits of both a cross-case comparison, in which variation can be identified in the empirical contexts between the three cases, and a within-case comparison, in which the interaction between a changing empirical context and the self-government goals expressed can be explored in detail.

2.2 Research design and case selection

The main aim of this research is to explore the multidimensional nature of self-government goals and the ways in which they reflect the empirical contexts in which they are articulated. As a result of the need for contextual knowledge and longitudinal analysis, a small N comparison is therefore appropriate (Mahoney et al, 2009: 116). This is achieved through the within-case and cross-case comparison of three key parties: the Scottish National Party, the Volksunie, and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. In the section which follows, I will set out the rationale for my use of the comparative method, the case selection criteria and universe of cases, discuss some of the specificities of the Flemish cases, and discuss the time frame of my research.

2.2.1 Comparing parties and self-government goals across time and space

Comparisons can help us build theory and guide further research, serving as '*a springboard for theoretical reflections about contrasting findings*' (Bryman, 2008: 61). Comparison is considered the '*engine of knowledge*' and can help to identify empirical relationships, rather than simply measure them (Dogan and Pelassy, 1990: 8). To this end, two forms of comparison are carried out in the course of this research: firstly, a within-case analysis of change within each of the three parties selected for inclusion from their origins onwards and secondly, a cross-national comparison between the three parties selected for inclusion.

Within-case comparison provides an opportunity to analyse, in depth, the interaction between a party, its self-government goal, and the context in which it is expressed (Mahoney, 2007: 132; Peters 1998: 137). The advantages of a within-case analysis include an in-depth exploration of processes and mechanisms and a premium placed on historical explanations (Bennett, 2004: 19). In this research, each case study is examined from its origins, onwards (Tilly, 1995: 1601). This allows me to identify outcomes and processes which are significant within the individual cases (Mjoset, 2009). These are presented in the form of single case analyses, allowing the party's framing at specific points in time to be explored in detail.

This is further strengthened by cross-case comparison, with the inclusion of three sub-state nationalist parties. Given the goal of qualitative comparison is to *'understand the distinctive dynamics, mechanics, and particularity of each case*', a small N research design was

appropriate for this research (Platt, 1998). By restricting my study to just three cases, I was able to develop the contextual knowledge necessary for meaningful analysis and examine how the specific phenomena of interest manifested in each of the three cases (Pierson, 2004: 6; Rueschemeyer et al, 1992: 4; Hall & Taylor, 2006: 952; Collier, 1993; Ragin 1991). This was also consistent with the historical institutionalist principles and discussed in chapter 1 which inspired this research, allowing for attention to '*real-world empirical questions*', '*historical interpretations*' and the influence of institutions on behaviour and outcomes (Steinmo, 2008: 108).

A small N comparison allows the researcher to capture and demonstrate '*the main character and originality of each situation*' (Dogan & Pelassy, 1990: 127). As a result, this was appropriate when related to the goal of this research - not to predict but to begin to explain the framing of each party (Mahoney et al, 2009: 116). My comparison was further enhanced by the focus on parties from their origins to 2014, which would have been more difficult, both analytically and practically with a larger number of cases (Lijphart 1971: 691; Gerring 2004: 353).

There are trade-offs to qualitative, small n research (Bennett, 2004: 20). It limits my ability to speak more generally about all sub-state nationalist parties, with my conclusions restricted to the three cases studied here. However, I have made an effort to situate the individual parties in question in the broader context of sub-state nationalist parties and the studying of a small number of cases in intensive detail may contribute to theory-building (Peters, 1998: 138; Hantrais, 1999: 100). As a result, in both my analysis of each individual case and across the three cases, I focused on bringing out the contextual detail and exploring the complexity of processes and mechanisms present in each of the three cases rather than reducing the data to quantifiable indicators.

2.2.2 Case selection and comparison

The selection of cases included here was to allow the key puzzle of this research – the framing of self-government in light of the empirical contexts in which it is pursued – to be developed. The three cases are not crucial cases in the sense in which Eckstein (1975) uses it. They are nonetheless important cases in which we would expect the interaction between value rationality and instrumental rationality to manifest. In other words, by virtue of their goals, their levels of electoral success, and their relevance within their

respective systems, we would expect these parties to demonstrate rationality – adapting their value rational goals to reflect the context in which they operate. The three parties are notable for being some of the most successful and relevant sub-state nationalist parties within their respective political contexts, and ones I believe possess with sufficient similarities to allow for fruitful comparison (Przeworski & Teune, 1970: 39).

The position, discourse, and behaviour of political parties is of interest to this research and my universe of cases was restricted to those which met the criteria for sub-state nationalist parties outlined in chapter one (Mahoney & Goertz, 2004: 660) This includes (1) the claim to represent a specific community or nation; (2) and the mobilisation of the party in a specific territory; (3) in favour of a preferred constitutional or territorial outcome; and (4) the pursuit of these goals through democratic means. Additional criteria were identified, guided by my interest in the influence of European integration and state reform or decentralisation. The case selection was restricted to parties with systemic relevance, which by virtue of this relevance will have to produce detailed self-government goals which take into account the contexts in which they take place. Relevance varies over time but it is clear that all three parties have a profound impact on their respective systems. The universe of cases, or parties which meet these criteria is quite small, and include parties active in Flanders, Wallonia, Scotland, Wales, Catalonia, and the Basque Country.

I do not, in this research, adopt a most-different-systems-design or a most-similar systems design when selecting cases as I am not seeking to test theory and identify direct causal relationships. Instead, inspired by Skopcol and Somers (1980) comparative historical approach, I adopt a '*contrast of contexts*' approach which allows me to identify the unique features of an individual case and examine the way in which these might shape the processes at work and outcomes in each.

My case selection strategy seeks to '*address the issue of equivalence by searching for analytically equivalent phenomena - even if expressed in substantively different terms - across different contexts*' (Locke & Thelen, 1998). While we see variation in the self-government goals expressed by each party, there is a functional equivalence which allows for fruitful comparison – all three parties seek a degree of self-government and frame this self-government in light of the empirical context in which it was pursued

The Scottish National Party, the Volksunie, and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, meet the criteria outlined above. They make claims to represent the Scottish or Flemish nations, compete for voters within the boundaries of this territory, mobilise on the key dimension of self-government and pursue these goals through democratic, and electoral means. The three parties are paradigmatic democratic sub-state nationalist parties, making claims for self-government within the territories of Scotland and Flanders on the basis of national distinctiveness. They are also some of the most successful sub-state nationalist parties when we evaluate their electoral results, success in achieving their self-government goals, whether in full or in part or directly (through participation in government) or indirectly (by pressuring rival parties to enact reforms) and as a result of their participation, either at the centre or at the sub-state level. There is, naturally, variation in the level of success and the pace of development for each party. The SNP has spent much of its lifetime on the fringes of electoral politics, only achieving sustained representation in the 1970s. This is in contrast to the Volksunie and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie which both experienced a rapid growth in support quite early on in their respective lifespans. These are what Ragin would describe as positive cases, or some of '*the best possible instances of a phenomenon to be explained*' (Ragin, 2009). We can also consider them as cases that meet the criteria of serving as '*ideal types*' or recognised instances of a specific phenomenon due to their success and systemic relevance. (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012: 179).

The objective of case study research is aimed at developing a comprehensive understanding of just a few cases, allowing us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Collier et al, 2004: 87). As a result, I was interested in contextual detail, examining '*regularities, patterns, mechanisms and recurrent processes*' rather than a specific, and measurable relationship between different factors.

2.2.3 The Case(s) of Flanders

The Flemish parties merit further discussion, as the Volksunie emerged in the 1950s only to dissolve in 2001. The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie was the official successor of the Volksunie, receiving the institutional resources of the party, although it failed to achieve sufficient support to maintain the party name. This raises the question in this research about whether the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie is truly new or is as Mair asks '*old wine in new bottles*' or '*new wine in whatever sort of container modern tastes might find appealing*'? (Mair, 1999: 217). The N-VA consciously situates itself as a successor, describing its roots as '*a young*

political party whose ancestry is rooted in democratic Flemish nationalism', evolving from the Volksunie (N-VA, 2017). It is largely treated as such in the literature on the party (Van Haute, 2011; Deschouwer, 2009; De Winter et al, 2009; Hooghe et al, 2006). Beyens et al (2015) ask if the N-VA is '*born again*' or '*born anew*' in an article which employs Barnea and Rahat's (2011) framework to assess newness, examining labelling, ideology, voter, formal status, institutions, activists, representatives, and policies. They ultimately conclude that the evidence is mixed, arguing '*newness*' is multi-dimensional, and the N-VA has drawn on both the legacy of the Volksunie as well as developed new policies and priorities. It may, with the increase in electoral success and changes in membership and voters, have become more new since its origins, and the party is characterised as '*combining newness and continuity, heritage and conscious strategic choices'* (Beyens et al, 2015: 7).

Ultimately, the decision to structure this research around three cases, rather than treating the Flemish nationalists as a single case, is an attempt to reflect this complexity. I therefore treat the two parties as separate entities, but attempt, in my analysis, to identify instances of continuity and change in the framing of self-government goals from the Volksunie to the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. This allows for enhanced within-case comparison as well as cross-case comparison.

2.2.4 Time frame

To capture changes within the party and within the contexts in which it operated, a longitudinal analysis is employed for this research (Pierson, 2000: 72). This is in in keeping with the historical institutionalist traditions which inspire this research, reflecting an acknowledgement that a party's origins will shape its present (Hay, 2002: 14). This also allows me to capture temporal variation in both the self-government goal and the empirical context in which it is articulated. Many of the processes of interest in these research are not short-term processes, but involve a gradual evolution, and by employing a longitudinal approach, this can be captured.

In light of this, the three parties are studied from their origins to dissolution (in the case of the Volksunie) and from their origins to 2014, for the Scottish National Party and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. This research concludes with the May 2014 federal elections in Belgium, which marked the start of government negotiations, and the September 2014 referendum on Scottish independence. By adopting a longitudinal approach, I can capture

temporal variation in both the empirical contexts and internal party dynamics. These include: (1) the emergence and acceleration of European integration, encompassing times when this project has progressed or stalled; (2) changes in the structure of the British and Belgian states, with an extended process of federalisation in Belgium and asymmetric devolution in the United Kingdom; (3) and shifts in the party system, both as a result of these state structure shifts but also reflecting general patterns of party system change. Each of these will be explored in more detail in the contextual introduction of each chapter.

This long-time period (spanning a total of 140 years between the three parties) does pose both methodological and practical challenges which should be addressed. By covering parties from their origins to the present day (or dissolution), my access to primary sources was limited, particularly in the early years of the SNP and the Volksunie. Interpretations of documentary data could not be verified through interviews and the range of older sources was comparatively limited. In light of these constraints, the decision was made to focus on providing snapshots of key points in time, rather than a detailed process tracing of a party's political development, step by step. These key moments are highlighted in each empirical chapter.

2.3 Data collection

The focus of this research on the articulation of self-government goals necessitated the study of documentary evidence, or discursive texts (Van Dijk, 2002). The corpus of this research includes campaign literature (manifestos and programmes, leaflets, speeches, and political advertising), conference documents, parliamentary statements, memoirs and biographies, and accounts of party history. A selection of supplementary interviews were conducted as a means of verifying my analysis and media coverage, particularly for key events. The material selected for analysis was obtained from party archives, web pages, national libraries, research institutes, and print and online media. In total, this numbered about 400 individual documents.

Manifestos form a core data source throughout this research, providing a means of tracing a party's publicly stated position on an issue at key points in time. Manifestos are advantageous for political research due to their content and format. They represent an '*open, public statement of the party's ideas and proposed policies, and a concrete embodiment of the party's*

construction of itself, its relations to other agents and its interactions with the context as a whole' (Breeze, 2011: 10). This is in contrast with other sources of evidence which may represent the views of a faction or individual within the party (Budge, 2006: 51). Manifestos are unique in their ubiquity, as all major parties produce them, their availability within the public domain and for their largely consistent format which simplifies temporal analysis (Volkens, 2001). They are characterised by clarity, simplicity and repetition of language (Budge, 2001: 51). They are at once the '*hymn sheet*' and '*source book*' for political activists and as a result, provide a comparable data source appropriate for longitudinal research (Kavanagh, 1991: 7)

Manifestos were collected from the party's origins to present. Where manifestos were not available, constitutional documents and party statutes which include a clear statement of the self-government goals of the party were substituted. In the case of the SNP, a manifesto was not published for each election, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, a period in which the number of seats contested was very low. Somerville (2013: 15) described the challenges of policy research during this period in the party's history, as it possessed '*no official policy, only a string of pamphlets, leaflets, articles and statements which had to be pieced together in order to gauge Party tendencies*'. In light of this, I've used policy statements for this period, which may not reflect the electoral context and may also reflect the views and preferences of a particular leader, rather than an agreed party statement. The collection for the Volksunie was more complete, with the congress texts which formed the basis for the party manifestos compiled by the party and made available in academic libraries. Manifestos of the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie were gathered from the party's archives and website. Manifestos were, at the outset of this research, intended to form the bulk of the dataset. However, due to the limited attention paid to self-government goals within these texts as well as high levels of repetition from year to year, additional sources were needed, particularly as my interest in the three empirical contexts external to the party developed.

I gathered a variety of additional party documents, published by the parties themselves and external institutions. This included parliamentary records, government publications and records of speeches made by party leadership. These were taken from parliamentary and government websites, research institutes, and national and university archives as well as from media archives. Documents were selected for their relevance to the international and European context, the state structure, and the party system and included publications,

speeches and transcripts of parliamentary debates on further European integration, proposed state reforms, and media accounts of electoral competition. These primary sources were supplemented by media accounts which is consistent with my interest in framing – how a party represents its goals to an *external* rather than an internal audience. Reports from the media were also used to provide contextual data and capture responses to emerging events, particularly those which took place between election years where manifestos offered more comprehensive coverage.

My collection of archival and documentary data was supplemented by fourteen elite interviews with current and former party officials. The aim of the interviews was to test my analysis and interpretation of the party literature and to gain further insight into party policy rather than to gather a representative sample of views (Goldstein, 2006: 669). In selecting subjects, I engaged in purposive sampling, or selecting respondents '*on the basis of what they might know to help the investigator fill in the pieces of a puzzle or confirm the proper alignment of pieces already in place*' rather than attempt to create a representative sample (Abernach & Rockman, 2002: 673). The selection of subjects was informed by recommendations from colleagues, research into prominent figures and availability of subjects. Interviews took place between February and August 2014, with interviews with N-VA and Volksunie representatives taking place in the early spring, prior to European, federal and regional elections which took place in May 2014. The data collection for the SNP took place in late spring and summer, just a few months in advance of the referendum. Interviews took place in the offices of the subjects, in Edinburgh, Brussels, Antwerp, and Leuven and lasted between 45 minutes and 60 minutes. Interviewees were informed as to the subject of my research in advance.

Ultimately, interviews were used to supplement the overall analysis rather than as a core data source for two key reasons: access and data quality. The proximity of my fieldwork to campaign periods in Belgium and the referendum in Scotland restricted my access to key figures within the parties. My initial period of fieldwork in Belgium was limited to archival work as it fell just before the publication of the party's confederalism proposals and as a result, politicians were unwilling to discuss these. Access in Scotland was better but also influenced by the referendum campaign. Initial interviews confirmed my decision to use this data source as a more limited component in the research as subjects largely

focused on the upcoming campaigns and seemed reluctant to speak to past party positions or activities.

I was also struck with the discipline demonstrated by some interviewees. In interviews with members of the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, I was informed of the artificial nature of the Belgian state with many of my interviewees using very similar language. Interviews with former party leadership (of both the SNP and leaders of the Volksunie) were more instructive but were also likely coloured by time and perspective, particularly as several of the Volksunie interviewees had left politics altogether or had joined other parties. While earlier interviewing would have perhaps alleviated some of this campaign focus, access before the publication of the Scottish Government's white paper detailing the party's position on independence and before the endorsement of the N-VA's confederalism proposals was not possible. Although I considered carrying out a second round of interviews after the election and referendum, I felt these would be unduly coloured by the referendum and election results and would offer limited further insight for the purposes of my research questions.

The publication of two key documents*, Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland* and the *N-VA's Change for Progress* provided an opportunity to examine the most recent and most developed self-government goals of the two parties in greater detail than was previously possible. The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie published its congress text Change for Progress on 31 October 2013, for approval at the party's January 2014 congress. The 649 page white paper, *Scotland's Future: Your guide to an independent Scotland* was published by the SNP-led government on 26 November 2013. These two documents represent the most comprehensive statements to date on these parties' self-government goals, and their publication provided an opportunity to conduct a focused analysis of how these goals are constrained by the three contextual arenas of interest to this research. I also gathered speeches, debate transcripts, editorials, blog posts, and social media content surrounding these two events. The results of this analysis will be presented in chapter 7.

2.4 Data analysis: framing analysis

The goal of this research is to capture and explain the framing of self-government goals over time and between cases in response to a party's understanding of the empirical contexts in which it operates. Evidence is found in the language employed by parties in

the key texts identified above, with language considered to be the '*meat and gristle of political life'* (Gerring, 1998: 298). To that end, my method combines a textual analysis, more specifically the analysis of frames. Rather than looking at a party at a single point in time, I trace and analyse the use of frames over time, to identify instances of change. This allows me to explore the relationship between institutional incentives, or empirical contexts, and the way in which political parties justify their self-government goals that would be impossible to extract directly (Thelen, 1999: 376). By examining the framing of their goals, or the ways these institutions are defined and problematized, we can identify the ideational factors which shape this research. Frames allow us to '*locate, perceive, identify, and label*' the ideas of actors (Goffman, 1974: 614).

Discussions of politics and policies are inherently frame focused '*as politicians intentionally and necessarily emphasize different messages and arguments in a policy debate*' (Schaffner & Sellers, 2010: 1). However, it wasn't until recently that frames were used by political scientists, with framing research typically confined to scholars of media and communication and social movement studies. Heibling et al (2010, see also Heibling, 2014) looked towards framing analysis as a means of understanding the justification of immigration policy. New works in studies of territorial politics make use of these techniques. The special issue of *Party Politics* organised by Elias, Szocsik and Zuber (2015) employed an analysis of frames which sought to examine the ways in which regional and statewide parties decided how to engage with issues falling outside the centre-periphery dimension. These works suggest the potential of framing analysis in the study of political parties. (Field and Hamann, 2015; Basile, 2015). Other notable works include Moufahim et al's (2015) study of the use of frames by the Vlaams Belang and Chaney's (2013) work on statewide parties' framing of Scottish and Welsh decentralization.

On a basic level, frames represent the definition of a problem and a potential solution to the problem (Benford & Snow, 2000: 614; Entman, 1993: 52). Frames are defined as '*values, beliefs, goals, rhetoric, ideological elements… slogans, tactics, motivations, portraits of "us" and "them", prognoses and diagnoses*' (Johnston & Noakes, 2005: 12) While many instances of framing analysis focuses on the impact on audiences, my use of frames focuses on their articulation by frame makers. Framing allows us to capture some of the strategy inherent in political communication as actors attempt to justify and bolster support for their claims through their interpretation of external events.

Of interest to this research is the process by which issues are re-examined and reframed in response to changing political conditions as well as the ways in which frames are articulated across contexts. In the empirical chapters which follow, I examine the interaction between the goal of self-government, broadly defined, and the empirical context in which it is pursued, asking how self-government goals are framed with reference to the opportunities and constraints inherent in these contexts and how these contexts are used to justify the pursuit of self-government. Within each empirical context, I selected dimensions, or aspects of an area, that were expected to be of interest, informed by the theoretical literature on sub-state nationalist parties. These included, for example, within the international context, the uses of European identity, and the relationship between the sub-state nation and the world.

Framing analysis is inherently comparative, with researchers identifying common frames between actors within a single movement, within comparable movements, and across both time and space. However, a framing comparison of the type conducted here, both within-case and cross-national, is less common within the existing literature. By adopting a longitudinal approach, changes in the framing of self-government goals, in response to changes in the empirical context, can be identified. Between cases, we can identity similarities and differences in the construction of arguments in favour of their goals. This necessitated a process of open and iterative coding close engagement with the source material, and a process of constant comparison. Below, I present a high-level overview of my coding schema.

As discussed above, my data collection for this project rendered an enormous amount of data, more than 400 discrete documents and countless pages of documents, in English, Dutch, and French. The use of NVivo software as a depository for all relevant documents, precis, and interview notes facilitated the coding and analysis of documents and the identification of frames. For each manifesto, I produced a summative content analysis or precis, allowing me to identify the core goal and areas of interest, a process recommended when working with long texts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Rapport, 2010). In this process, the self-government goal was identified, discussions relevant to the empirical contexts were highlighted, and key points and quotes were logged.

All relevant documents were coded according to the areas of interest and frames employed. My coding process was inductive and followed the three steps set out by Miles and Huberman (1994) : (a) an initial open code, in which general themes were identified; (b) axial coding: a coding of all documents, with patterns labelled; (c) selective coding and refining of the coding process.

I first conducted an open code on each documents, identifying broad themes as they emerged (Van Gorp, 2010: 94). This open code was based on key theoretical themes as identified in the literature. I first coded text according to the policy area or general area to which they referred. This provided an opportunity to deepen my familiarity with the material and identify areas where further research was required. Broadly, my coding took the following form:

Preliminary coding schema	
Self-government goals	The stated self-government goal of the party and words used to describe it.
International issues	References to self-government and the international or European context
The state and state structures	References to the state, state structure, and the relationship between the broader state and the sub-state nation
The party system	References to the pursuit of self-government with the party system

My second round of coding was more focused, drawing on both on my initial impressions from the open coding process as well as the themes the literature suggests might emerge. I developed a codebook of recurring frames, both between cases and over time. Ultimately this coding of frames was too granular – focused on the content rather than general use of frames and in some cases, these frames were only evident in one or two instances. Upon reflection, a more general coding schema was developed in the third stage of coding and I revisited my sources with this coding schema in mind. This was organised according to context – allowing for comparable frames to be identified but also for variation to emerge. For example, within the international empirical context, I examined three main dimensions: (1) self-government and the world; (2) self-government and

European integration; and (3) international and European identities. Within each dimension, frames are identified. Some of these are shared between parties, for instance, the framing of the nation as a European nation, while others remain unique to each party. The absence of a specific frame can be equally important as its presence. A summary of the specific dimensions explored in each chapter is presented below.

Table: Context and Dimensions

Empirical context	*Dimensions*
The meaning of self-government	1. *Value rationality* 2. *Instrumental rationality*
Self-government, Europe and the world	1. *Self-government and the world* 2. *Self-government and European integration* 3. *International and European identities*
Self-government and the state	1. *The state and existing state structures* 2. *Proposed and realised state reforms* 3. *Visions of self-government and relations with the state*
Self-government and the party system	4. *The party and its rivals* 5. *The party and its pursuit of self-government*

The use of NVivo versus other manual methods of content analysis was crucial to allow for the verification of coding and adjustments as my analysis developed (Wickham & Woods, 2005). The search function also allowed me to test certain hypotheses, identifying when a specific phrase or language emerged and examining earlier texts.

2.5 Presentation of analysis

The analysis of self-government goals is divided into five key chapters, the first of which provides a contextual introduction to the three parties selected for inclusion in this study as well as traces self-government goals and the framing of purposes of self-government over time. The presentation is inspired by analytic narratives, which present '*detailed and textured account of context and process, with concern for both sequence and temporality*' (Levi, 2003).

The following three chapters address each of the three empirical contexts discussed above: the international and European context, the state context, and the party system context. The final empirical chapter looks specifically at the 2014 campaigns, examining the SNP and the N-VA. This provided an opportunity to examine the self-government proposals at close range and analyse the interaction between the framing of self-government generally, the role Europe and the international context played in these visions of self-government, the ways in which each party framed the state, and how they positioned themselves within an electoral context. In each chapter, I present a brief contextual introduction, identifying key events, in acknowledgement of Steinmo's exhortation that '*one cannot even define what a rational act is without examining the context of that behaviour*' (Steinmo, 1996: 7).

Chapter Three: Continuity or Change? Evaluating self-government goals over time

The study of sub-state nationalism has been, at times, hindered by terminological complexity and artificial divides between parties on the basis of their self-government goals. This research attempts to bridge this divide, studying three parties which would seem to place themselves on different points on the continuum of self-government, but who share important commonalities in their pursuit of these goals and their justification for them. In this chapter, I present and begin to unpack these self-government goals as well as their justification.

This chapter serves three purposes, two contextual and one analytical. The first purpose is to provide a brief introduction to each of the parties, detailing their origins, political development, and identifying key moments in their lifespan.

The second purpose is to demonstrate the evolution in the labelling and definition of each party's self-government goals over time, examining both the language used to describe these goals and what that might entail. The goal of this exercise is to study changes over time and examine the content of these goals in more detail. Toubeau (2011: 432) discusses the challenges in identifying the goals of such parties, and this becomes apparent in the analysis presented here. We see variation in the labelling of goals – employing both constitutional terms like federalism, confederalism, and independence, but also more ambiguous and emotive language of freedom and autonomy. We also see the ways in which these concepts may be stretched, departing from legal definitions to adapt to their individual context.

Finally, I examine the framing of the purposes of self-government, according to the party. In doing so, I employ Varshney's (2003) framework of *value* and *instrumental* rationality detailed in chapter one. Turning first to values, I operationalise a value rational frame as containing an assumption that a nation requires self-government and that self-government allows for the self-actualisation of a national community. Instrumental frames are those made on the basis of the '*what for*' of self-government, and can include themes of democracy, economic prosperity, social policy or cultural development. These frames reflect the specific political or economic circumstance of the territories in question, with parties arguing in favour of self-government to address certain conditions.

My emphasis on value and instrumental rationality rests on an assumption that these rationales will contribute to the way in which the party engages with the empirical contexts in which it operates. One would expect a party which wholly justified its goals with reference to value rationality would be insensitive to changes in the empirical contexts in which it operated, while a party which employed only instrumental rationality, or both value and instrumental rationality would be more sensitive to contextual constraints.

This chapter is organised by party, and I begin with the eldest party, the Scottish National Party, before moving onto the Volksunie, and then the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, a convention maintained in the chapters which follow. I conclude with a comparative analysis across the cases of the labelling of self-government and its purposes over time.

3.1 The Scottish National Party

The SNP has a long history, one characterised by electoral victories and defeats and periodic debates over its territorial goals, strategy and ideology. It has grown from a party at the fringes of UK and Scottish politics to one at its very core (Leith, 2008: 84-5). Soule et al (2012: 1) assess the systemic relevance of the SNP, noting it has '*gone from being a peripheral, at times ephemeral, movement, represented by a party that struggled to gain democratic representation, to a point where explicit political nationalism is an ever present feature of Scottish politics*'.

The Scottish political space of the 1920s was a crowded one, with home rule associations, parties, and interest groups pursuing various political and cultural goals (Lynch, 2002: 5). The SNP was formed, in 1934, as a result of the merger between the National Party of Scotland and the Scottish Party to pursue explicitly political aims (Newell, 1998: 111; Lynch, 2002: 45; Mitchell et al, 2012: 13). The National Party of Scotland, formed in 1928 by Scottish intellectuals and with a left-leaning inclination and independence stance, first contested elections in 1929 but lacked the organisational capacity to make an impact (Harvie, 1998: 99; Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998: 137; Lynch, 2002: 36). The Scottish Party offered a more moderate self-government goal of Home Rule, specifically within the Empire, and a more right-wing ideological perspective (Lynch, 2009: 36; Cameron, 2010: 170). Mitchell describes the Scottish Party as '*a loose coalition of Liberals and Tories brought together by support for a moderate measure of home rule and a distaste for the NPS*' (1996: 181). After the two parties merged, the nascent SNP avoided taking an ideological position, speaking

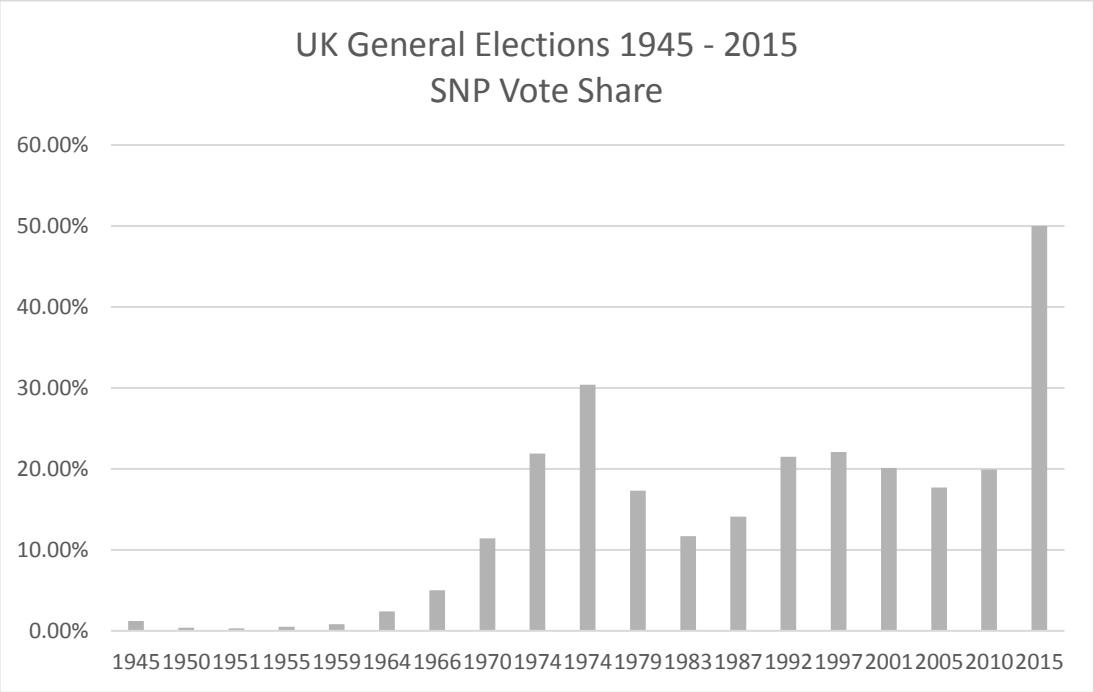
instead of the need for self-government. More radical members of the NPS were expelled (Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998: 137).

The SNP struggled to make an electoral impact in its early years, lacking organisational resources as well as a coherent message, having '*a surfeit of poets and a lack of politicians*' (Mitchell, 1996: 25) Harvie (1998: 173) describes the SNP's early days as a '*modest family business*' with the '*simplicity of eighteenth-century Scottish religious dissent: a single political tenet which was 'one thing needful'*', the pursuit of Scottish self-government rather than a broader programme of social and economic policy. The start of the war complicated things further, and Kellas characterises the state of the party as '*torn by schisms, reminiscent of by-gone Presbyterian conflicts, and were generally regarded as cranks*' (Kellas, 1968: 202). It struggled to develop a coherent position on the conflict and the conscription of Scottish officers (Mitchell, 1996: 185; Lynch, 2002: 51). Internal divisions over self-government and the means by which it should be pursued also emerged, with the Scottish Convention, led by John MacCormick, emerging from the SNP in 1942 and adopting a platform in favour of home rule within a federal UK (Mitchell, 1996: 123). Under MacCormick's leadership, the Scottish Convention gained support in the post-war period, with an estimated two million people signing the Scottish Covenant, obscuring the work of the SNP (Lynch, 2002: 2; Harvie, 1998: 170-1).

Despite these conditions, the wartime period represented an opportunity for the SNP. Not privy to the political truce between the main parties, it was able to contest seats as they became available (Cameron, 2010: 191; Lynch, 2002: 53; Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998: 140. It first passed the threshold of representation in the 1945 Motherwell by-election with the election of Robert McIntyre but lost it in the General Election of the same year (Harvie, 1998: 169).

In the post-war period, the British political system saw a return to business as usual and the subsequent emphasis on reconstruction, welfare state expansion, and economic centralisation left little political space for territorial demands (Lynch, 2002: 2). As a result, the SNP was to remain a '*resilient little sect*' for more than two decades (Harvie 1998: 169). Its electoral activities were limited to contests in which it could afford to pay (and forfeit) deposits should it not succeed in passing the required threshold of 12.5 percent (Lynch, 2011: 238). The party contested only 43 seats between its formation in 1934 and 1964.

Organisationally, its capacity was limited (Jaensch, 1976: 306; Hutchison, 2001: 85). It did not publish formal manifestos during this period, and possessed '*no official policy, only a string of pamphlets, leaflets, articles and statements which had to be pieced together in order to gauge Party tendencies*' (Somerville, 2013: 15). It faced competition from the Scottish Convention, which sought to exercise its influence over traditional parties rather than stand candidates for election (Mitchell, 1996: 85). The SNP's persistence in the face of these challenges was credited to a '*small group of individuals who were sufficiently committed to Scottish independence to keep the party going during its darkest years*' (Lynch, 2002: 2).



Until the 1960s, the party had little systemic relevance, failing to gain seats or even put the issue of Scottish autonomy on the political agenda (Harvie, 1993: 88). However, in the 1960s, the perception that both Conservative and Labour governments had failed to address Scotland's economic problems lent credibility to its message (Hutchison, 2001: 122; Newell, 1998: 107). The 1960s saw organizational expansion, more detailed policies, and marketing collateral which allowed it to more effectively communicate and campaign (Lynch, 2009: 628; Hutchison, 2001: 119; Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998: 141). The most notable innovation was the '*It's Scotland's Oil*' campaign (Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998: 141). As Hutchison suggested, the oil issue '*allowed the Nationalists to position themselves as the guarantors of the maintenance of the Welfare State and full employment, just at the time when Labour's traditional pretensions to this role seemed highly questionable*' (Hutchison, 2001: 122).

Winnie Ewing's 1967 victory in the Hamilton by-election was significant – showcasing the party as young and modern and placing Labour on notice that the SNP could present a threat, even in the safest seats (Cameron, 2010: 281; Harvie, 1998: 178-9; Kellas, 1968: 203). Until this point, Gordon Wilson, party leader, describes the SNP as '*a very successful protest movement*' which menaced statewide parties but had not yet experienced a victory (Wilson, 2009). Although Ewing lost her seat the following general election, the win gave the party a new sense of confidence, a sense augmented by the doubling of vote share in the 1970 General Election and winning a seat in the Western Isles (Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998: 142). It increased the seats to seven in February 1974 and eleven in October 1974. Although it would not, until 2015, surpass this number in a UK General Election, it had crossed the threshold of representation in a decisive way and benefited from an increase in membership and attention. It appealed to voters experiencing social and geographic mobility, and those in search of a new political identity (Hearn, 2000: 4; McCrone, 2001: 118).

Mitchell (1996: 174) describes the period between 1967 and 1979 as the party's drunk period, in which expectations rose about the SNP's ascendency and the inevitability of self-government. Kellas defines the SNP in 1970 as a sort of Social Democratic party, '*rather more collectivist than the Liberals and yet apparently opposed to centralisation and bureaucracy*'. The ambiguity inherent in its position was a subject of intense debate, with some, particularly newer, younger members advocating the adoption of a left-wing position to challenge Labour for its base while others emphasised its position aloof from ideological politics (Lynch, 2009: 627). Labour applied the pejorative '*Tartan Tories*' while Conservatives described the SNP as left-wing.

The party's electoral success from the late 1960s incentivised action on the part of both the Conservative and Labour Parties. However, proposals which fell short of political independence exposed internal tensions, between so-called fundamentalists, viewing devolution as a dangerous distraction from its independence objective, and gradualists, who viewed devolution as a positive step towards independence (Cameron, 2010: 298; Mitchell, 1996: 212; Hutchison, 2001: 124; Hepburn & McLouglin, 2011: 389). This debate is encapsulated as the choice between '*independence nothing les*s' or devolution as a route towards Scottish self-government (Mitchell et al, 2012: 21). Although the SNP voted to support the Labour government's proposal in the 1979 referendum, campaigning was

lacklustre, hindered further by the amendment which required 40 per cent of the entire Scottish electorate to vote yes (Harvie, 1998: 195). The defeat of the referendum, a result of its failure to overcome the electoral threshold, led to the party voting with the Conservatives in a vote of no confidence against the Labour government (Newman, 1996: 38). The subsequent election saw the defeat of the SNP, which lost 9 of 11 seats (Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998: 142).

Soule et al (2012: 1) describe this outcome as a '*twist of political irony*', which marked the start of nearly two decades of political centralisation and Conservative rule. Further tensions emerged over the party's ideological positioning, its self-government goals and the viability of fundamentalist and gradualist strategies (Mitchell, 1996: 224). The 79 Group represented the first significant organised ideological faction within the SNP, advocating the adoption of leftist social and economic policies in an effort to challenge Labour (Hutchison, 2001: 145; Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998: 142; Lynch, 2009: 630). It also favoured '*full independence*' as *'a prerequisite for the fundamental change in society which would lead to the social and economic restructuring of Scotland*' (79 Group, 1979). The group drew on younger middle class professionals for its leadership and support (Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998: 142), and in 1982, the 79 Group was expelled from the SNP (Mitchell, 1996: 221). Despite the suspension, many key figures remained in the party, including future leader Alex Salmond (Harvie, 1998: 201, Hearn, 2000: 54; Mitchell, 1996: 230)

The SNP's vote share fell further in the 1980s, mustering only 11.7 per cent of the vote at the 1983 general election, signalling a need for change (Newman, 1996: 40). Gordon Wilson led the charge to re-evaluate three key aspects of SNP policy - devolution, Europe and defence - in an effort to bring the SNP into the political mainstream (Mitchell et al, 2012: 29). It struggled throughout the 1980s, however, facing competition from the Labour Party on the issue of devolution (Harvie, 1998: 238).

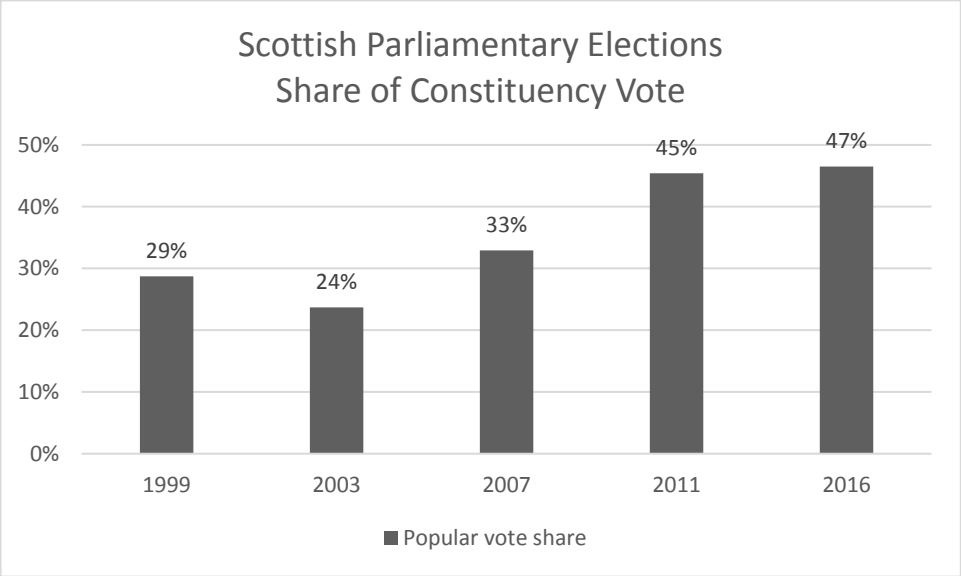
Civil society mobilisation on the issue of devolution grew throughout the 1980s. The Campaign for a Scottish Assembly, a cross-party civil society group, was launched in 1980, and included Labour and SNP members. In 1989, the Claim of Right was published and signed, asserting the sovereignty of the Scottish People and committing its signatories to a Scottish Assembly (Cameron, 2010: 332; Mitchell, 1996: 101; Newell, 1998: 110; McCrone and Lewis, 1999: 17). The SNP declined to participate in the Scottish

Constitutional Convention that resulted from the Claim of Right, fearing the campaign would be dominated by Labour and would serve as a distraction from the cause of independence (Mitchell et al, 2012: 31; Lynch, 1996: 1). A press release announcing the withdrawal questioned the efficacy of the measure and its dominance by the Labour Party. '*Scotland lost out in 1979 because of a rigged referendum. It is our view that the SNP cannot take part in a rigged Convention which can neither reflect nor deliver Scottish demands*' (SNP, 1989). Remaining on the fringes of this broader movement, the SNP was undercut by Labour which was, through its participation, able to '*recapture the mantle of Scotland's national party*' (Mitchell, 1996: 129). However, there were signs the party was willing to adopt a gradualist approach to self-government, remaining sceptical of the potential of devolution, but willing to accept it as a stepping stone towards independence. In January 1995, it had abandoned its '*Independence and Nothing Less*' policy in favour of a gradualist '*Highway to Independence*', doing so in light of growing calls for a devolved legislative body for Scotland (Mau, 2005).

Following their 1997 General Election victory, the Labour government introduced a referendum for more powers for Scotland. While the 1979 referendum was put forth by '*an exhausted minority government desperately clinging to power*', the 1997 vote took place in much different circumstances (Cameron, 2010: 347). The campaign was aided by the unity of the pro-Yes vote parties, including the SNP, as well as what Harvie (1998: 245) describes as the '*surgical decapitation*' of Scottish Conservatives who were in disarray following the 1997 election which left them with no representation in Scotland. The SNP pledged to support devolution, but also intended to use the Parliament as a stepping stone for independence (Mau, 2005).

Devolution opened up new opportunity structures, allowing the SNP to entertain the prospect of participation in government and use this position to pursue its self-government goals (Mitchell et al, 2012: 1). The party shifted its attentions, focusing its efforts on '*forming a government in Edinburgh rather than being a marginal presence at Westminster and in Brussels*' (Lynch, 2009: 632). While the party gained 35 seats in the 1999 election, rendering it the official opposition in the Scottish Parliament, its failure in 2003 to improve on this number meant disappointment within the party. The party was struggling make an impact in a space in which its main rival could claim to represent the national interests. (Ichijo, 2012: 24). The party focused on internal organisational reforms and saw changes in leadership in response to disappointing electoral results (Mitchell et al, 2012:

40; Cairney, 2011). John Swinney resigned in 2004 and Alex Salmond stood for election with Nicola Sturgeon as deputy (Mitchell et al, 2012: 45). Nicola Sturgeon became leader of the SNP at Holyrood with Salmond as *'a Nationalist leader in exile*' until 2007 when he was elected to Holyrood. After Alex Salmond's return, the party adopted a regional-list strategy – appealing to voters in 2007 to elect Alex Salmond for first minister (Johns et al, 2009). This move capitalised on the nationalist leader's personality.



In 2007, the Scottish National Party entered national office for the first time, winning a narrow victory over Labour. It benefited from negative perceptions of Labour's performance in government and the study of the 2007 election by Johns et al (2009) stressed the importance of valence politics rather than constitutional issues in this contest. The election of the SNP in 2007 precipitated increasing attention to constitutional change (Cairney, 2011). For the UK parties, this took the form of the Calman Commission, set up to review the powers of the Scottish Parliament with a view to increasing fiscal accountability and strengthening the Union (Calman Commission, 2009). The SNP Government's parallel process, the *National Conversation* explored the alternative constitutional options facing Scotland and extoled the virtues of independence (ScotGov, 2009). Although the party was elected with a manifesto commitment to hold an independence referendum, its status as a minority government prevented it from securing the necessary legislation. Harvey and Lynch (2012) explain that by delaying the referendum, the party was able to further its policy aims, helping the SNP '*detach itself from independence at Scottish elections and aid its capacity to gain government office'*. In 2011, the SNP saw

a landslide victory, securing 53% of seats in a voting system designed to prevent single party majority government, paving the way for a referendum (Cairney, 2011).

Although ultimately unsuccessful in 2014, the SNP has had, and continues to have, an enormous influence in the Scottish political landscape. Its rise was slow, however. Not until seven decades after its foundation did the party enter office and command the tools of government to help pursue independence directly.

3.1.1 Changes in the form and content of self-government

The SNP has, from its origins, advanced a vision of external self-government, over time, labelling this goal differently – using the political term of independence, self-government, and home rule, or more emotive terms of freedom. Hassan (2011) described the SNP as possessing a '*relaxed attitude to what independence and statehood are*' but upon careful examination, we can see a consistent commitment to political independence, although an independence articulated with reference to continued relationships with the United Kingdom and within broader international structures. The content of these goals has evolved over time, reflecting the external and state contexts which will be discussed in chapter four and chapter five respectively.

At its origins, the SNP was vague about its goals, focusing on '*self-government*' as a more general term. This was a result of the merger of two parties who were at different points on the continuum of self-government (Johns & Mitchell, 2016: 92-6). The more radical National Party of Scotland sought to '*restore the independent National status of Scotland*'. However, this entailed some shared competences with England and continued coordination through the Commonwealth (Finlay 1992: 194-5). The Scottish Party sought a more moderate form of home rule, explicitly embracing shared rights and responsibilities, particularly regarding the Empire (Finlay 1992: 185; Cameron 2010: 170; Mitchell, 1996: 181). When the SNP formed in 1934, it called for '*self-government for Scotland*', including '*the establishment of a Parliament in Scotland which shall be the final authority on all Scottish affairs*'. It also sought mechanisms for the joint management of the British Empire and coordination on defence, foreign policy, and customs (SNP, 1934). Mitchell (1996: 182) describes the differences between the two parties as reconciled '*by the simple expedient of stressing their joint commitment to Scottish self-determination*', leaving it up to the Scottish people to determine what form this would take. For the newly created SNP, this self-government

was to be embedded within the context of the Empire (Robertson 2006; Kennedy 2006). In the 1940s, it called for political independence, which included the '*revocation of the Treaty of Union of 1707 and the restoration of political independence to Scotland*', while still situating these demands within the context of continued cooperation, both internationally and with the British state, discussed in detail in chapter four and chapter five (SNP, 1945). The term independence was not consistently employed by the party until much later.

TH Gibson, party leader in the 1950s, engaged directly with the issue of terminology in a 1951 address, asking '*What do we mean when we use the phrases "Home Rule," "Self-government", and "Statehood"?*' Intriguingly, he did not use the word independence. Self-government meant '*The restoration of Scottish National Sovereignty by the establishment of a democratic Scottish Government freely elected by the Scottish people*' (Gibson, 1951). In this scenario, the Westminster Parliament would not have any authority *'in or over Scotland'* (ibid). The party's 1952 document, *Scotland's Present Position*, continued to use the language of self-government rather than independence, with self-government denoting the status of '*a free and equal nation within the Commonwealth and under the Crown*' (SNP, 1952). This language of self-government rather than independence was also used in the 1960 document *Speaking for Scotland* (SNP, 1960).

A shift emerges in the 1960s, with a notable increase in the use of the language of independence, although often accompanied by more ambiguous language of sovereignty or freedom. The SNP's 1964 *Draft Constitution for an Independent Scotland* described its aims as a '*free, independent, democratic nation*', in which sovereignty rests with the people. The stated goal was often ambiguous throughout the 1960s, focusing on the opportunities of a '*New Scotland*' or '*Freedom*' (SNP, 1967; SNP, 1968). Its 1968 policy statement, then the most comprehensive to date, *The SNP and You*, referred heavily to freedom. '*'What we seek for Scotland is plain - Freedom through Unity - Freedom and power to rule herself, reform herself, respect herself*' (SNP, 1968). Its aim was described as *'The achievement of a democratic, independent government in Scotland…*' with Scotland having '*political independence with full control of our affairs, and opportunities to take the initiative in the economic interdependence of European and world trade*' (SNP, 1968). This reflects, in part, a broader global tendency of decolonisation, and the use of this language of liberation represents an attempt to legitimise self-government goals. The SNP reiterated its founding objectives in the 1979 *Return to Nationhood* and on membership cards, pledging itself to the pursuit of:

> *'Self-Government for Scotland: that is, the restoration of Scottish National Sovereignty by the establishment of a democratic Scottish Parliament within the Commonwealth, freely elected by the Scottish people, whose authority will be limited only by such agreements as may be freely entered into by it with other nations or states of international organisations for the purpose of furthering international co-operation and world peace'*
>
> *SNP, 1979.*

Independence was explicitly highlighted in manifestos from 1979 onwards. A radicalisation of the party's language took place in the 1980s following the failed devolution referendum, a defeat at the polls, and a broader process of introspection within the party. The 1983 manifesto was described as a *'Manifesto for Independence*', with a de-emphasis on the British connection (SNP, 1983). Voters in 1987 were called to '*vote for their national freedom*' and the need for Scotland to '*regain her independence*' and '*win back our Parliament*' was stressed. Independence was regularly used from 1988 onwards, embodied in the tagline of '*independence in Europe'*. This entailed both political independence – the long-standing goal of the SNP - but also reflected the party's conversion to membership of the European Union. Independence, according to the SNP was '*the immediate, logical and clear cut answer to the question of how Scotland should be governed*' (SNP, 1992). It sought an independent Scottish Parliament, embedded within Europe (SNP, 1997).

With devolution, the party maintained its independence goals, but incorporated devolution as part of the process, or a stepping stone to independence. Self-government was understood as '*21st century independence*'. This hinted at an acknowledgement of the interdependences and constraints of the modern world and allowing for continued cooperation, both with the rest of the United Kingdom and within international and supranational bodies. The *Your Scotland, Your Voice: A National Conversation*, the final report which resulted from the National Conversation process, published by the SNP minority government, defined independence as a scenario in which

> *'Scotland would assume all the responsibilities and rights of a normal European state, including membership of the European Union and other international bodies, the ability to determine economic policy, including the currency, and full responsibility for defence and security'*
>
> ScotGov, 2009

The SNP's goal of political independence was broadly consistent over time. However, it varied on the degree of integration within broader structures that it would entail, with the SNP looking to both the British Isles and the European Union to provide a supporting framework for their self-government ambitions. Notably the language of the party evolved, reflecting internal divides over independence and the popular language of the time. This evolution was described by former party president Gordon Wilson in a research interview as a '*conscious*' choice:

> *'Sovereignty was always there, so it's a technical term. And it's relevant at the present time. Independence is a harder term, and it didn't start coming in until probably the late '70s, early '80s at a guess. And it wasn't always used'.*
>
> Wilson, 2014

The evidence above suggests independence was, in fact, used frequently, with the 1950s proving an exception. However, inconsistencies in the articulation of the self-government goal over time suggests strategic considerations and competing tendencies within the party.

3.1.3 The purposes of self-government: pure and utilitarian

The Scottish National Party's framing of the purposes of self-government engaged directly with value rationality, primarily linked with an assumption that a nation should have a state. But it also engaged with instrumental rationality, speaking to the practical and material ways in which self-government could benefit the nation. This duality was present throughout the SNP's lifespan – with self-government allowing national and state borders to coincide, as well as the achievement of political and economic goals.

These themes were developed explicitly by Neil MacCormick, a legal scholar and later SNP MEP who made an enormous contribution to the SNP's intellectual development. From the perspective of pure nationalism, '*Scottish independence may be seen as a means to an end or as an end in itself. To see it as an end in itself is to adopt a very pure nationalist principle: simply because Scotland is a nation, she ought to become a separate state…*' (N. MacCormick, 1970: 52).

In contrast, '*utilitarian nationalism*' stresses independence '*as being the best means to the well-being of the Scottish people*' (MacCormick, 1970: 52). In the party's 1974 manifesto, it justified its pursuit of self-government with reference to both principles and practical solutions:

'*Self-government is a matter of principle: but it also provides the only effective way of dealing with the practical problems that are facing the people of Scotland*' (SNP, 1974).

Three frames will be discussed: (1) the value rational frame which operates from the assumption that a nation must have a state; (2) the notion, also rooted in value rationality, that self-government is necessary for the self-actualisation of the nation and the national community; and (3) the instrumental rational frame that suggests self-government is a means of pursuing broader social and economic goals. While the salience of instrumental and value rational frames has varied throughout the party's lifespan, both remain important and present in the justification in self-government goals.

1. A nation must have a state

The framing of self-government as a value in and of itself, separate from any instrumental concern, is present throughout the SNP's history, but takes different forms over time. In a 1951 address entitled *The SNP. What it is and what it stands for,* party president TH Gibson described the purpose of self-government in idealistic terms, stressing the necessity for nations to have a state in order to fulfil more universal values of peace and prosperity

> *'And where nationhood and statehood coincide, then the combination has always proved to be the greatest and best influence in co-operation between nations and national states, and for the advancement of peoples both spiritually, and materially, and above all for peace'*
>
> TH Gibson, 1951.

He continued, making an explicit link between nationhood and statehood, arguing '*Nationhood is not easily repressed for all time, and it strives status – that is statehood, which after all is the practical application of nation-hood*' (ibid). This argument is developed in Sandy McIntosh's *100 Home Rule Questions* in which he attributes the SNP's demands to principle rather than practical considerations: '*Scotland's demand for self-government is not based on the fact that she is self-supporting, but on the inalienable right of every self-respecting country to rule its own affairs*' (McIntosh, 1966).

In a speech in the House of Commons on the Scotland and Wales bill, Donald Stewart asserted the value rational position of the SNP, saying the aim of the SNP – the independence of Scotland – '*arises from the fact that Scotland is a nation. It proceeds to a constitutional principle – the right to self-determination of that nation*' (HC Deb 13 December 1976

vol 922 c1025). What Neil MacCormick would call '*pure nationalism*' was largely articulated within the context of a '*normal nation*' which suggested both an inherent congruence between a nation and statehood and the abnormality of the status quo. The SNP's self-government goal was to ensure this congruence, or to restore Scotland to the status of '*normal nation*', or the independence which '*is taken for granted by other nations*' (SNP, 1983).

Although this link is drawn between nationhood and self-government, it is moderated by an emphasis on self-determination, allowing Scots to exercise their sovereignty through a vote for independence, whether via the channel of the SNP, or directly in a referendum.

2. Self-government as self-actualisation

Self-government, according to the SNP, would allow for the restoration of confidence and self-worth to the Scottish nation. This frame of self-actualisation was repeatedly employed by the party, implying a criticism of the status quo, which rendered Scotland dependent – unable to realise its ambitions as a nation and take responsibility for its own affairs. The party's 1967 document, *The Scotland We Seek*, set out the conditions under which Scotland would be *'[p]olitically born again*' and able to fulfil its ambitions as a *New Scotland*. Billy Wolfe's 1972 conference speech, reprinted in *Scotland Lives (1973)* stressed this theme of self-actualisation and revival and the SNP's role in mobilising around these issues.

> *'It is for the SNP to play a vital role in educating the Scottish public to realise that Scottish independence means other freedoms as well. It means freedom from the cultural and social stereotypes imposed on us by the imperialist past with which the English are so obsessed. It means freedom to express ourselves and to act as we ourselves decide. It means freedom to be a nation again'*
>
> Wolfe, 1973: 17.

Embedded within this narrative of self-actualisation was one of responsibility – allowing Scotland to stand up on its own two feet and be responsible for its own successes and failures. *'The point is that independence will restore to Scots people a sense of responsibility and, much more important, the reality of responsibility for their own future*' (N. MacCormick, 1970: 53). In a December 1976 debate on the Scotland and Wales Bills, SNP MP Margaret Bain explained:

> *'We do not want to look for scapegoats. We want the rights and responsibilities of taking our own decisions. If errors are made, they will be our errors, and we cannot then blame Westminster or the English. We can blame ourselves, and I think that that is an important and fundamental right for all nations and for all people'*
>
> HC Deb 13 December 1976 vol 922 c1449.

Gordon Wilson described the desire for Scots to take on new responsibilities and exercise them, noting '*If the power of decision-making is taken away from an area, its opportunities for self-development are correspondingly limited*' (HC Deb 14 January 1976 c459). This focus on self-government as responsibility was linked with the party's support for devolution, both in the 1970s and in the 1990s. On the opening of the Scottish Parliament building, Presiding Officer George Reid returned to the theme of responsibility discussed by Bain and Wilson in the 1970s, describing of the Parliament as '*A place where now, with devolution, if we make mistakes they are our mistakes – and we can no longer blame anyone else*' (Reid, 2004).

In the introduction to her autobiography, Winnie Ewing described the nature of Scottish nationalism as focused on the self-actualisation of the nation. *'Our national freedom is about freedom for each one of us - the freedom to fulfil our potential'* (Ewing, 2004: ix). Independence was therefore necessary '*to allow us to be the people we can be*' (Ewing, 2004: 355). In a speech at the 2005 party conference, Alex Salmond spoke of the disappointment Scots felt with devolution, a product of overruns in costs for the Scottish Parliament building, expense scandals and an absence of leadership from the main UK parties. In his concluding remarks, he said '*Scotland needs Independence, self-determination and self-respect' (*Salmond, 2005). Nicola Sturgeon reiterated this =in a 2006 Scottish Parliamentary debate on the *Future of Scotland*, with independence discussed as a means of restoring self-confidence and accountability to Scotland '*The freedom to control our own destiny and to reach our full potential is as important for Scotland's people as it is for our nation*' (SP OR 6 September 2006, col 27249).

This frame of self-actualisation became supplemented by one of self-government as a means, allowing Scotland to realise its ambitions in both moral and practical matters.

3. Self-government as a means

Although the SNP stressed the importance of the nation and national self-actualisation, self-government was always discussed as a means by which specific policy goals could be pursued and problems particular to Scotland could be addressed. It employed pragmatic,

policy-oriented arguments, stressing an agenda focused on securing prosperity for the residents of Scotland, although not one always informed by a coherent left-right ideology. These arguments were both diagnostic, identifying the ills of the current state structure, and prognostic, detailing how a self-governing Scotland would do better in the domains of culture, the economy, democracy and social policy.

From its origins, the SNP sought self-government but also to improve the social and economic conditions of Scotland which allowed it to weigh in on other policy areas beyond self-government. One of its earliest publications *Our Aim is Freedom* focused on the opportunities offered by independence to secure greater prosperity, saying:

> *'We believe that the Scottish people should have in its own country the control of natural monopolies of land, transport, electric power, and minerals and the control of currency and credit, that all Scots may share in the riches of their own land and enjoy a higher standard of living that they have yet know'*
>
> SNP, ca 1940s.

In Robert McIntyre's 1944 pamphlet, *Some Principles for Scottish Reconstruction*, he asked '*When Scotland is self-governing, what kind of country will we make it?*' a question which exemplifies the challenge which faced the SNP in articulating both why self-government was necessary and what a self-governing Scotland might look like. These concerns were also detailed in *The Scottish National Party Demands for Scotland*, a pamphlet outlining its postwar strategy and concerns (SNP, ca1940s). Poor health outcomes, the number and quality of housing, inequality, unemployment, and industrial decline were all, at various points, highlighted as problems affecting Scotland and ones that could be remedied by self-government. Neil MacCormick (1970: 53) characterised Scotland as a '*sick society*', prescribing '*an independent centre of political life in Scotland to take control of Scottish affairs*' as a cure.

Billy Wolfe documented an effort by the party to de-emphasise nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, arguing ninety per cent of Scots are already nationalists but needed convincing on the details. In *Scotland Lives*, Wolfe sets out the purpose of self-government, noting it is not a panacea but an opportunity.

> *'It has always been clear to the SNP that the first priority is the attainment of self-government; not that having a Parliament in Scotland is going to work a miracle overnight,*

> *but self-government will enable us to do things for ourselves in our own way with our own resources'*
>
> Wolfe, 1973: 14.

To secure the support of voters, the SNP should focus on answering two questions - '*Will Scotland be prosperous and secure with a government of our own?*' and '*Can the SNP show that it has the policies and the men and women to lead an independent Scotland in an efficient and democratic way?*' (Wolfe, 1973: 147). In its February 1974 manifesto, voters were asked '*Do you want to be "Rich Scots" or "Poor British"*?' arguing in favour of self-government on economic grounds. Nationalism as an ideology was to be '*essentially practical*', a modern response to the concerns of the Scottish people rather than the fulfilment of a nationalist principle (I. MacCormick, 1970: 93)

As the party developed its social democratic ideology, the emphasis on the purpose of self-government became more pronounced. Independence was necessary to create a new society, one '*based on justice, fairness and freedom. It will be a society in which the rights of our people are clearly defined. From this we can ensure Scotland is protected from the many failings and injustices experienced under the UK system*' (SNP, 1987). The paper's draft *Constitution for an Independent Scotland*, published alongside its manifesto for the 1997 Westminster election, stated the purpose of independence as one defined by policy.

> *'By making that choice, Scotland will place itself in a position to take maximum advantage of its rich abundance of natural resources and native talents and will be able to speak directly to the world, contributing from its store in appropriate fashion both to the international order and to those nations who are less advantaged'*
>
> SNP, 1997a.

This suggests an increasingly pragmatic and instrumental framing of self-government and is consistent throughout the devolutionary period. Its proposals from 1999 onwards focused on economic development, social justice and the furtherance of Scotland's interests. In its first Holyrood manifesto, the SNP described the opportunity facing Scotland as '*a nation that can use its wealth for its own priorities, creating not just a rich country but a rich society*' (SNP, 1999). The party's continued commitment to self-government was motivated by policy goals, with Alex Salmond detailing in his 2007 programme for government '*the transformation of our country in each and every one those policy areas can best be*

achieved through that normal, independent status' (Salmond, 2007) . Independence would allow Scotland to develop policies, both at home and abroad, which would reflect Scottish values and the instrumental framing of self-government reflected the issues of the day. The Scottish Government publication *Your Scotland, Your Voice*, published by the SNP-led government as part of the *National Conversation* process focused on the limitations of the current constitutional settlement in the domains of health, social welfare, justice, and education and spelled out how the powers of independence might be used to facilitate improvements in these areas (ScotGov, 2009).

This pragmatic approach reflected the ideals of the SNP but was also intended to make independence more palatable to those hesitant to support nationalism as a matter of principle rather than purpose. Alex Salmond's 2010 Perth conference speech stressed this pragmatism: '*For be assured, I do not want independence for its own sake, but for the sake of the people here and now and those to come*' (Salmond, 2010).

While self-government was persistently portrayed as a means through which specific policy goals could be pursued, those goals shifted over time, reflecting both the ideological development of the SNP and the adoption of a centre-left platform, as well as the specific social and economic concerns facing Scotland.

The SNP's justification of its self-government goals is thus both a reflection of its value rational assumptions about the need for a nation to have a state, and instrumental assumptions about the need for self-government to fulfil certain policy goals. Value rational assumptions were particularly salient in the party's earliest manifestos, while later manifestos stressed the more instrumental or pragmatic justifications of independence. This framing was also employed by the Volksunie, with some variation on the salience of value rational versus instrumental goals.

3.2 The Volksunie

The Volksunie is notable as a sub-state nationalist party for its rapid rise, entry into government at the centre, success in fulfilling many of its self-government objectives, and collapse in the face of this success. The VU emerged in the postwar period, with claims to represent those marginalised within the highly pillarised and divided Belgian political system. It owed its roots to the older Flemish Movement, which at its origins focused on

cultural matters, but adopted political demands following the First World War (Rochtus, 2012: 273). The VU emphasised its democratic credentials in an effort to remove the stigma of Flemish nationalism following its association with radical right elements in the 1930s and duringthe German occupation (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009: 284; Rochtus, 2012: 273).

Upon its emergence, the Belgian political system was heavily defined by partisan alignment with the traditional pillars and divided over the Royal Question[1] and the School Pact[2]. In response, the Volksunie offered a cross-pillar Flemish democratic alternative, advocating an open vision of politics and participatory democracy in a postwar Belgium (Delwit & Van Haute, 2001: 15). Its core platform included three key components: (1)

[1] The Royal Question focused on the behaviour of Leopold III towards the Nazis during the Second World War. The debate focused on his return following the war and a referendum on the issue was held in 1950, with cross-national divides in voting patterns. Flemings voted 72% in favour of his return, in contrast to 42% of Walloons. In response, Leopold abdicated in favour of his son (van Goethem, 2010: 195)

[2] The school pact, agreed in 1958, addressed a long-standing conflict between Catholics, Socialists, and Liberals over the management and financing of education. Catholics had historically expressed resistance to the expansion of the secular education system in Belgium, which conflicted with postwar educational priorities. The three traditional parties were forced to negotiate a compromise (Witte at al, 2009: 257).

federal restructuring of the Belgian state; (2) amnesty for those convicted of collaboration during the Second World War and, (3) the industrialisation of Flanders (CRISP, 1966).

The VU first stood for election in 1954, under the name of Christelijke Vlaamse Volksunie but did not formally become a party until following the election, removing Christelijke from its name. It returned its first representative in 1958 and became increasingly relevant in Sartorian terms throughout the 1960s as community issues dominated the agenda (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009: 285). By the 1960s, there was signs of its growing relevance, and we witness mainstream parties '*playing on regionalist sentiments*' in order to attract support at the centre (Reuchamps & Caluwaerts, 2014: 51). In 1965, the Volksunie became the fourth party in Belgium. A contemporaneous account describes the '*powerful influence on Belgian political life*' of the VU, representing '*real force in Flanders, for which it must be taken into account to explain the current political climate*' (CRISP, 1966).

The party system was shifting, with traditional parties increasingly orientated towards their territories and the emergence of regionalist counterparts in Wallonia, the Rassemblement Walloon and in Brussels, the Front Democratique de Francophones (Newman, 1995: 45; Dandoy, 2013: 63). They were, however, unlikely to collaborate, differing on their objectives and mistrustful of one another, as '*[t]he Flemings wanted political power to match their new economic power; the Walloons wanted political power to counter their economic decline*' (Saey, Kesteloot, et al. 1998: 175).

Issues of community conflict were also increasingly salient, with the debates about the language border providing an opportunity for the Volksunie to take a stand on the issue, raising its political profile. A debate took place within Belgian political parties over whether the language border should be determined by decennial language census or permanently fixed. The 1962-1963 language laws determined that these borders would be fixed, which reflected the preferences of the Volksunie (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009: 284). Rather than reducing community conflict, this led to a widening of the self-government agenda beyond language. The subsequent redistribution of seats to reflect demographic realities also contributed to the salience of this issue. This resulted in *'a parliament in which representatives are supposed to represent their own language group*' (Sinardet, 2010: 352).

This contributed to regionalist tensions within the traditional parties, with a new generation of politicians mobilising to defend the interests of their regions. The Christian Democrats, Liberal and Socialist parties split into Flemish and Francophone branches in 1968, 1972, and 1978 respectively, allowing them to better mobilise and counter the regionalist threat (De Winter et al, 2006: 934). All new parties which formed following 1978 were explicitly organised along community lines (Dandoy, 2013: 53). This increased the salience of the cleavage and placed state reform on the political agenda (Swenden & Jans, 2006: 880).

In the 1970s, the VU began to position itself as a party of prospective government, with a growing emphasis on policies beyond state reform (Govaert, 1993: 7). It was no longer a linguistic party, but a '*party of power*' (ibid: 9). It participated in negotiations following the March 1974 elections but ultimately decided to support the government from outside – a response to the refusal by the Rassemblement Walloon to participate in government. The VU entered into government just two decades after its first participation in a general election. Joining the government was a source of internal tensions, which is consistent with the literature on government participation for non-mainstream parties. Some felt the *'intransigent position [of the party] had met its limits*', and prepared themselves for the compromises that government participation entailed (Van Haute, 2011: 212).

The party's participation in the government formed after the 1977 elections and Egmont Pact that resulted from the coalition negotiations was contested. One third of the National Council voted against the measure and the membership at large opposed it (De Winter, 2011: 34). The Volksunie was punished for its participation in the ultimately failed negotiations, losing 30% of its vote.

Entry into government was a source of contention within the party and exacerbated existing tensions between more radical and moderate elements (Govaert, 1993: 18). Factions emerged, including the Vlaams Blok, which, at its origins, supported Flemish independnece but later expanded to include a far-right policy profile, focused on immigration and anti-politics (Walgrave & De Swert, 2004; Mudde, 2000:177; Hossay, 1996: 354; Breuning 1997; Breuning & Ishiyama 1998). The Vlaams Blok outbid the Volksunie on the issue of self-government and provided an alternative for voters

disillusioned with the more progressive platform of the VU or its moderation on the issue of self-government.

Despite internal objections and the electoral consequences, the VU maintained its commitment to participation in government. It joined the central government in 1988 - 1991 (Martens VIII). It also participated in the Flemish Executive in 1981 -1985 (Geens I), 1988 -1992 (Geens IV) and 1992 - 1995 (van den Brande II). It was in the Flemish Government from 1999 until the party dissolved in 2001 (Dewael - Somers).

Volksunie Performance 1995 - 1999

Year	Election	Vote share
1995	Flemish Parliament	8.96
1995	Belgian Chamber*	7.8
1999	Flemish Parliament	9.25
1999	Belgian Chamber*	8.9

Belgian Chamber results denote percentage of Flemish voters

In contrast to its rapid rise, its decline and fall was a protracted process, with periods of resurgence and revival. The VU's successes – in placing issues of Flemish self-government on the political agenda, in entering into government, and in furthering the federalisation of the Belgian state – may ultimately be responsible for its demise.

Because of its '*big tent*' approach to nationalism, the Volksunie faced tensions within its membership. More traditional voters struggled with the party's adoption of a more progressive '*post-industrial*' agenda in the 1970s (Newman, 1995: 51). There were also divides on both the prioritisation of state reform, the degree of state reform necessary and the means by which it was to be carried out. Following the successful federalisation of the Belgian state in 1993, the VU struggled to redefine its role. It attempted to mobilise voters around further self-government but also around progressive social issues and disillusionment with the nature of Belgian politics, beset by scandals. The challenges of balancing its role as an opposition party at the federal level and a party of government at the Flemish level may also have contributed to this confusion.

Internal tensions preoccupied the party (Wauters, 2005) and it saw the defection of leadership and members, satisfied they had achieved their core objective and feeling free to seek out a party which aligned more closely with their views on socioeconomic policy (Delwit & Van Haute, 2001: 18). This led to discussions within the party regarding its stance on a wide range of social and political issues but also what can be described as the '*volksunie-sation*' of the Flemish parties as MPs and members from Volksunie disbanded to Flemish Christian Democrats, Liberals, and Socialist Parties, taking their calls for further Flemish autonomy with them (De Winter et al, 2006: 939). Paradoxically, the VU began to unravel at a time in which there was a strong degree of consensus among the Flemish parties on the direction of travel for Belgian decentralisation as well as comparatively strong performance by the VU, increasing its voters by 60,000 in 1999 in comparison to 1995 and being included in regional coalition. However it was a crowded political space. In 1999, the *Handvest voor Vlaanderen*, endorsed by the Flemish Parliament, set out Flemish demands for further state reforms (Swenden 2013: 6). As a result, '*the regional branches of the mainstream Flemish parties had become the main protagonists in the post federalization phase*' (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009: 295). The party agreed, following the 1999 elections, to participate in the Flemish regional government, their participation necessary to block the Vlaams Blok but argued its participation was contingent on progress of reforms at the centre. However, the decision was contentious within the party (Govaert, 2002).

In response to these tensions, three factions emerged within the party, which reflected existing tendencies obscured by the need to secure Flemish self-government prior to federalisation. Johan Sauwen's group, Niet Splitsen, advocated the case for continuity, while Geert Bourgeois highlighted the need for a return to democratic nationalism emphasising conservative values, and Bert Anciaux advocated a more progressive nationalism as an alternative to conservative flamingantisme (Delwit & Van Haute, 2001: 21). In 2001, faced with a contentious leadership debate and deep-seated concerns about its ideological direction, members were asked in 2001 to endorse or reject the following statement '*the different tendencies which exist at the heart of the VU can no longer coexist. It would be impossible to stand together in the 2003 elections*' (Delwit & Van Haute, 2001: 20; Wauters, 2005: 337). Fifty-eight percent of responding members agreed, triggering a party conference in which different proposals were presented for consideration.

Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, led by Geert Bourgeois, emerged as a result of this vote and reaffirmed the party's commitment to democratic nationalism without adopting the progressive tendencies within the party. Out of the eight Volksunie deputies sitting at the federal level, two joined the Flemish liberals, one Spirit, one Agalev, and four remained with N-VA, leading to the further Volksunie-sation of the traditional Flemish parties and making the space into which the N-VA would emerge, even more crowded.

The VU can be understood, in many ways, as a victim of its own success. It rapidly rose to relevance and became, in 1977, one of the only sub-state nationalist parties to enter into government at the centre. In 1993, with the federalisation of the Belgian state, it largely achieved its original self-government goals. Its fall came at a time in which it was electorally successful, receiving 10% of the vote in a highly fragmented party system. De Winter (2011: 27) attributes its demise to the fact it crossed the threshold of government too frequently, making policy trade-offs without significant return on their investment and this would be a lesson learnt by the N-VA.

3.2.1 The moving target of self-government

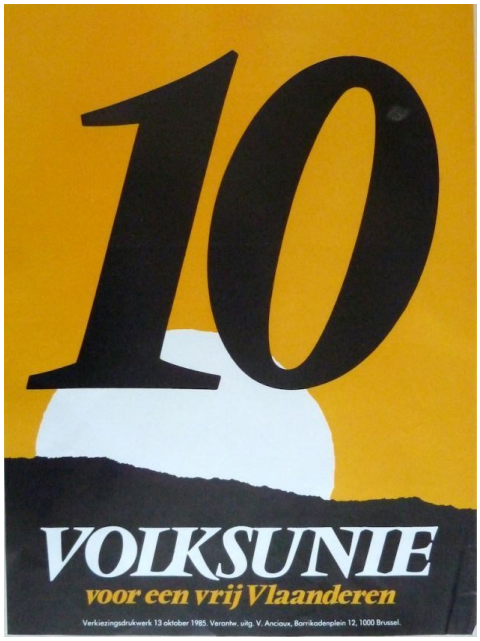
In contrast to the SNP, which began on the radical end of the spectrum of self-government, the Volksunie displays progression in its self-government goal, from internal self-government through a federalist model, to external self-government, either in the form of confederalism or independence. There was also more variation over time, with brief periods of radicalisation, and a distinction drawn by the party between goals to be pursued in the short-term and long-term ambitions. This variation may be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, the systemic relevance of the party shaped its articulation of its goals, as it was considered from the 1970s onwards, as a party which could be included in governing coalition. As a result, it had to advance goals which would be pursued in the immediate term. Secondly, it can be linked to both the success and failure of the party in pursuing reform of the Belgian state – with radicalisation or a move along the continuum, linked to the failure of state reforms and to its success.

At the VU's origins, it adopted the goals of the Flemish nationalist movement of the 1930s, focusing on both culturally protectionist objectives, including the recognition of the Flemish language and access of Flemings to decision-making at the centre, and state reform in the form of federalisation (De Winter, 2011: 39). Its expansion from the cultural

to the socioeconomic domains were motivated by '*The dangers of the world as well as a unified Europe'* necessitating federalisation and a statute of political autonomy for Flanders and Wallonia (VU, 1955). Federalism was defined vaguely as a '*positive political system*' which would allow for the pacification of community conflict (VU, 1967). The party's vision of federalism was a dual federation, with Flanders and Wallonia forming the federal units (VU, 1969). Each deelstaat would have extended powers with each possessing '*the maximum of self-government that is compatible with Belgium as a sovereign country*' (VU, 1962). In its 1967 proposals, it called for the devolution of culture, administration, health, housing, family policy, socio-economic policy, planning and public works and public order, while leaving the federal government to manage foreign policy and defence, general economic and political policy, public finance and social legislation (VU, 1967). The party incorporated other issues, including the environment and social issues throughout the 1970s.

Both the labelling and content of the party's goals shifted in the late 1970s and 1980s with its goal referred to as confederalism or integral federalism, seeking extended competences from Flanders and Wallonia. This radicalisation was motivated, in part, by the failure to achieve federal reforms through the Egmont Pact and a split within the party between more radical factions. It acknowledges this and appears to argue confederalism is undertaken reluctantly, given the failure of federalism to materialise, saying '*In the current circumstances, the Volksunie's objective is best realised in a confederation or a very far-reaching federation within Europe of the peoples and regions*' (VU, 1979). However, the opportunity for gradual reform had passed and the party noted '*That page had been turned. What might have been achieved in two or three stages must be demanded and conquered in one go*' (VU, 1978). In this context, the objectives of Flemish self-government could not be achieved in a federal structure.

The party envisaged Belgium as a federation or confederation of two independent units, Flanders and Wallonia, each with its own legislative chamber and own executive authority. The Brussels area would be designated as a capital and the status of the German-speaking area would be determined by those inhabitants (VU, 1979). In this model, '*all state power belongs to Flanders and in Wallonia, except those expressly assigned to the federation, confederation or supranational institutions*' (VU, 1979). Its language radicalised further in 1981, proclaiming '*the Volksunie wants a Flemish state. NOW!*' and proposed a reform which would see the '*dislocated state of Belgium*' transformed into a confederation between Flanders and Wallonia.



1985 Volksunie poster calling for a 'free Flanders'

After the radical agenda of 1979, the VU focused on state reform in the short term, with a long view towards a confederal structure, which was further elaborated in 1987 within a European context. Confederalism was to provide a framework for Europe and for the Belgian state, particularly in light of a move towards further integration in the form of the European Monetary Union. National power was *'an interim transitional arrangement'* and its goals reflected a desire to move towards a deeper level of European integration (VU, 1987). Its 1987 manifesto focused on a zelfstandig or an autonomous Flanders within both Europe and Belgium. *'The Volksunie remains committed to the development of a true and confederal Europe of the nations....In light of this, the Volksunie wants to transform the Belgian state into a confederation of Flemish and Walloon states*' (VU, 1987). Rather than devolving powers to the confederal units, the confederal units would decide what should be ceded to the central government and how funding would be arranged (VU, 1987). Competences identified as reserved included defence, constitutional matters, constitutional rights and freedoms, basic principles of social security, foreign policy and the minimum powers necessary to meet the conditions of the EMU (VU, 1987).

The proposed and realised federalisation of the Belgian state, a fulfilment of the Volksunie's original goals, required a rethink of what it would stand for. Its terminology and goals from the 1990s onward were vague – speaking of autonomy, independence, and integral federalism, reflecting divides within the party on the centrality and nature of self-government (Van Haute, 2011: 211; Deschouwer, 1999). Confederalism largely disappeared from party programmes. The agreement on federalisation as considered to be transitional, '*particularly as the objectives of the Volksunie were not fully met*' and in 1993, it called for radical *zelfstandig*, or autonomy for Flanders. This restructuring, the party affirmed '*is the main goal for the VU*' (VU, 1993) and included control over financial matters and an end to fiscal transfers. A focus on integral federalism, or a deeper form of federalism within the Belgian state, emerged as part of an emphasis on democratic

development and good governance as well as a long-term emphasis on Flemish independence within '*federal Europe of the nations*' (VU, 1987; 1982). This escalated in the 1995 manifesto, with the party explicitly stating: '*The ultimate goal of the state (re)formation remains, for the Volksunie, an independent Flanders within a federal Europe of the peoples and regions*' (VU, 1995). It also included full membership of the United Nations, suggesting a more radical goal of political independence, but one heavily embedded within the European Union (VU, 1995).

The VU supported the *Roadmap for Flanders*, published by the Flemish Parliament in 1999, and involving restructuring of the Belgian state structure from 3+3 to 2+2, a reduction in the status of Brussels and the German speaking community, fiscal and financial autonomy, and the transfer of competences in a variety of domains (Swenden 2013: 6; De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009: 296; Deschouwer, 2013: 339). However, it did so while calling for further reforms along confederal lines (Brassine, 2005: 31). This was to be an interim arrangement, until which point European integration was sufficiently developed to fulfil the functions of the Belgian state.

Throughout its lifespan, the Volksunie appeared agnostic on the structure and labels of self-government, focused more on achieving the necessary powers for Flanders than securing the trappings of statehood. In response to concerns about its labelling of its self-government goals, the VU argued it '*rejects the word fetishism and confusing or misleading use of the concepts of federalism, confederation or separatism. It is not the name of the reform that is important, but the content, and the purpose to which it is addressed*' (VU, 1981). This was evident both in the means by which it sought to achieve its goals, through participation in government, with the necessary compromises that would entail, and its framing of the purposes of self-government. However, an escalation along the continuum of self-government can be documented, with the party moving from a federal model in which a limited range of cultural and economic competences would be accorded to the constituent units of the Belgian federation to far-reaching confederalism or integral federalism, with the units deciding what they would share. External self-government, in the form of political independence, was mooted at various points, but under specific conditions – a breakdown in negotiations with Francophones or sufficient development at the European level which would allow the EU to supplant the functions of Belgian state. Unlike the SNP, for whom independence served as the final destination, the Volksunie was vague about where the

process of federalisation and transfer of competences would end, positioning itself to respond to emerging events and opportunities, particularly at the European level, discussed in chapter four.

3.2.2 Self-government for purpose and principle

The Volksunie framed the purpose of self-government in light of both value and instrumental rationality. From a value rational perspective, self-government enabled the construction and development of the Flemish nation and was required in order to facilitate the self-actualisation of the Flemish people. However, the majority of its discourse focused on instrumental concerns – whether linguistic, democratic, or economic. Self-government was required to allow Flemings to address their own problems and present their own solutions.

1. Self-government as self-actualisation

In the VU's value rational framing of the purposes of self-government, it spoke of self-government as necessary for the development of the Flemish nation and for its defence against the threat of assimilation, and later as necessary to allow Flanders to achieve its full potential.

At its origins, the Belgian state structure was viewed as an existential threat to the nascent Flemish nation. The party's first manifesto spoke of '*a disturbing picture of decline and disadvantage*' (VU, 1955). The Belgian state was considered a Francophone state, serving Francophone economic and political interests and stifling the ability of Flemings to prosper, both economically and culturally (VU, 1957). It described, in an extraordinary session in response to attempts by the central government to address the language barrier, the '*denationalisation of the original Flemish community and the Flemish people, and the immigration influx in Brussels*' (VU, 1961). This was precipitated by a '*150 year-long deliberate policy of the Frenchification by the Belgian unitary state*' (VU, 1961). It warned of progressive centralization '*a direct threat to our people'* in both Flanders, where economic interests were ignored by the Francophone central state and in Brussels and Flemish Brabant *'which is threatened with colonization*' (VU, 1961). In the party's view, '*A nation can only achieve its essential destiny if it has its own structure*' (VU, 1973/1975) and *'frees itself from any guardianship of dependency*', a pure nationalist perspective(VU, 1977). The current constitutional arrangement inhibits this, '*If*

a nation does not have a sufficient degree of political autonomy, then, especially if it is a minority, it will soon be the object of oppression' (VU 1973/1975).

In its 1970 manifesto, it spoke of the right of Flemish youth to realise their ambitions within a self-governing Flanders:

> *'They have a right to live in a Flanders which can manage its own affairs. They have an inalienable right to live amongst people who do not have to constantly spend their energy to maintain or secure their elementary rights, but can quietly and freely work on their welfare and the welfare of each individual'*
>
> VU, 1970.

The party's characterisation of the Belgian state as a threat to Flemish values and prosperitywas most explicit in the 1970s and 1980s, representing a more radical position adopted by the party following the failed Egmont Pact. In advance of the 150th anniversary of the Belgian state, the Volksunie asked '*What is there to celebrate?*', saying, '*the Volksunie wishes to emphasise that there is no reason for enlightened Flemings to commemorate the establishment of a state that has attempted to alienate us from our Dutch identity*' and remains an impediment to the development of the Flemish people (VU, 1979)

As federalism seemed imminent, the party described its path towards the realisation of Flemish self-government and the essence of the nation, saying '*We are finally on our way to the Flemish state, the essential linkage between the district and the world*' (VU, 1987). It had moved from a language of survival and self-government as necessary to combat existential threats against the nation to one in which self-government would allow the Flemish nation to flourish.

> *'The Flemish state reform is only a means, however important, to build a Flemish nation. This incarnation of the Flemish nation must be a society where the free development of individual citizens, coupled with being aware and responsible towards others, is fully possible'*
>
> VU, 1988.

It set out its plan for this, which included improvements to democracy and maintenance and reinforcement of individual rights (VU, 1987). This was to be part of a renewal of political culture in Flanders, with new ideas and an emphasis on democracy, transparency,

and accountability (VU, 1988). The 1990 congress text spoke of a '*richness in diversity'* and stressed the importance of community, self-determination and autonomy for both the individual and the community, and the nation within the wider world (VU, 1990). Federalism was to be '*a guide for building society, from the individual to the world community*' and in favour of autonomy, which will '*lead to a renewed and better Flanders*' (VU, 1990).

This shift in language – with the party moving from a need to self-government to protect Flanders to a need for self-government to allow it to further prosper can be attributed to material changes in Flanders.

2. Self-government for a purpose

From its origins an instrumental argument was made in favour of self-government, accompanied by a variety of cultural and economic policy proposals aimed at the party's prospective supporters (VU, 1955; VU, 1956). These issues were defined broadly and the VU rejected proposals for linguistic autonomy as insufficient, saying *'As Flemish nationalists, we believe that the Flemish question is a national matter for the Flemish people, as such it includes all sectors of society, it is not just a language issue, a cultural issue, a social or economic issue, but these together*' (VU, 1961). The policies stressed by the party, or the purposes of self-government, changed over time, reflecting first the issues of language rights and access before expanding into economic concerns, and in the 1990s, post-materialist policy proposals. This took three key forms: firstly, a means of ending conflict between Flemings and Walloons; secondly, a means of pursuing economic goals, and thirdly, to allow for the appropriate democratic representation of Flanders within the Belgian state.

Self-government, in its various forms, was framed as a means of ending continuous and counterproductive conflict between Flemings and Walloons which was rooted in different identities, desires, and interests. The party argued the two communities were now so different that '*a unitary government is no longer acceptable*', and as a result, '*only federalism can put an end to the constant nationalist conflict between the peoples*' (VU, 1962). Federalism was described as a remedy to the status quo, '*The Belgian house in which Flemings and Walloons huddle together and quarrel*' would be replaced by a compromise '*Under a single roof and behind a single façade, Flemings and Walloons live as they like in their own apartments*' (VU, 1965).

The underrepresentation and underperformance of Flanders, both in economic matters and in public life, was at the heart of the Volksunie's proposals. The party's economic

rationale for self-government has a temporal component, from its origins through the 1960s and from the 1960s to its demise. Reynebeau (2012: 9) describes a shift in the party's discourse, from rallying against '*contemptuous Francophone elites*' neglecting the interests of Flanders to '*wasteful or extravagant Walloons, who benefit from Flemish wealth without gratitude*', reflecting the change in the economic position of Flanders vis-à-vis Wallonia.

Self-government was to bring an end to the systematic suppression of Flanders by the unitary state, which manifested culturally as well as economically (VU, 1959). The party focused its economic proposals on what it perceived as its core constituents - farmers, the middle classes, and merchants at its origins although it situated itself as transcending traditional class cleavages. At its origins, a bleak picture of the Flemish economy was painted, focusing on '*decline and disadvantage*' and offering self-government as a remedy (VU, 1957). It proposed '*industrialization through self-government*' (VU, 1957). The existing situation, or '*undeniable disadvantage*' was attributed to the weakness of government and mainstream parties (VU, 1965). From the 1960s onwards, the economic argument in favour of self-government shifted with economic growth (Saey et al. 1998: 175). There was now '*no question of dependence or of subordination to Wallonia*' but rather a situation in which a prosperous Flanders subsidised a declining Wallonia (VU, 1969). Flanders did not, according to the VU, '*get its share of the cake*' (VU, 1971). It therefore demanded '*Flemish pennies in Flemish hands*', a refrain also adopted by the N-VA (VU, 1977). Self-government would prevent Flanders from being dragged down by Wallonia. With the economic decline in the 1980s, the Volksunie called for a *'rapid and drastic extension of the current inadequate proposals, towards a full and broad self-government*', which according to the party, was necessary to *'safeguard Flemish welfare*' (VU, 1982).

Self-government would ensure democratic representation for Flanders, increasing both self-rule and input at the central level of government. The VU rarely advocated the wielding of its demographic majority, but argued it sought to have Dutch recognised as equal in status (VU, 1956). This was considered as a concession to Francophones, but one the Volksunie was willing to make in the interest of an agreement (VU, 1956). It warned of state reforms which sought parity as the '*murder of the democratic right to vote*' (VU, 1965). By the 1970s, this message became more explicit, as a result of the recent successes of the Volksunie which allowed Flemings to channel their identity and the increasing economic confidence of Flanders. '*The Flemish people are themselves in recent years becoming*

increasingly aware of their identity: they are aware of their real political, social, and economic significance in this country… Since then, the Flemings naturally claim what belongs to them' (VU, 1971).

The democratic argument in favour of self-government became more pronounced in the 1990s in light of political scandals, and accelerated as the party allied with the ID21 which defined itself as a radical democratic party (VU & ID 21, 1999). Self-government proposals were paired with broader institutional developments, arguing in favour of bringing decision-making closer to the people with reference to the local, national, and European context (VU, 1993). This included democratic reforms, direct participation in government with provisions for binding referendums, although not on the issue of self-government, an end to mandatory voting, the introduction of direct elections to the central government, and a reduced role of both the monarch and the senate (VU & ID21, 1999).

The VU's framing of the purpose of self-government acknowledged areas of value rationality, with a link made between the need for self-government in order to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the Flemish people, but primarily focused on instrumental rationality, with self-government framed as a means to improve democratic representation, the position of Flemings, and the material circumstances of Flanders.

Its instrumental approach to self-government afforded it some flexibility when pursuing its self-government goals. Compromises and intermediate steps could be accepted and even embraced as a means of furthering the instrumental goals of self-government – pacifying community conflict, boosting the economy, and increasing democratic representation. The VU acknowledged this flexibility directly in its 1978 manifesto, describing state reform as the means to an end, with a choice to be made between '*federalism, confederalism, and independence*' (VU, 1979).

These positions were largely adopted by the Volksunie's successor, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, which shifted ideologically to the right but maintained an emphasis on self-government as a means of pursuing specific policy goals.

3.3 The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie

The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie emerged as a result of the split of the Volksunie, with its leadership having secured sufficient support to maintain the Volksunie's organisational

resources but not the name. The party consisted of the VU's more conservative and nationalist supporters and sat ideologically to the right of the Volksunie at the time of its demise (Huysseune, 2016; Beyens et al, 2015). In its *Statement of Principles*, the N-VA situates itself in the democratic Flemish nationalist tradition of the Volksunie and emphasises its commitment to continuing the process of state reform.

> *'Building on 45 years of successful work by the Volksunie, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie is launched with a renewed, ambitious task: to shape a humanitarian nationalism of the 21st century in Flanders. No glorification of our own people, not constantly looking backward, but a clear vision on the challenges of today and tomorrow'*
>
> N-VA, 2001: 1.

The party stressed its democratic nationalist credentials, focusing on both Flemish self-government and the pursuit of socioeconomic policies which reflected the mainstream preferences of the Flemish voter (Rochtus, 2012: 269; Huysseune & Dalle Mulle, 2015).

Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie Performance: 2003 - 2014

Year	Election	Vote share
2003	Belgian Chamber	4.9%
2004*	Flemish Parliament	26.1%
2007*	Belgian Chamber	18.5%
2009	Flemish Parliament	13.1%
2010	Belgian Chamber	28.3%
2014	Flemish Parliament	31.88%
2014	Belgian Chamber	29.8%

*Denotes electoral cartel with CD&V and N-VA

The N-VA's chances of success appeared minimal, emerging as it did an intensely crowded Flemish party space in which mainstream parties could credibly claim to represent the Flemish interests and called for further state reform beyond federalism

(Deschouwer, 2013: 338; De Winter et al, 2006: 28; Adams, 2014; Gerard, 2014: 259). With the exception of the Socialists and Greens, all parties worked to highlight their Flemish credentials, with Vlaams appearing in their party names (Deshouwer, 2013: 346; Fitzmaurice, 2004: 150). De Winter et al (2006: 939) describe the '*Volksunie-sation*' of the Flemish party system, both as a result of policy changes and the movement of former VU politicians into the ranks of traditional parties. In contrast, there was not a similar mobilisation in favour of Wallonia and state reform on the Francophone side (Blaise, et al, 2009: 17).

The party's first election presented a challenge, both from within, with limited organisational resources, and from systemic efforts to mitigate some of the fragmentation of the Belgian political system with the introduction of an electoral threshold of 5% (Cadranel, 2003: 59; Onclin & Reuchamps, 2011: 11; Hooghe et al, 2006: 357; Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011: 638; Reuchamps et al, 2014: 1089). In response, and in order to ensure its survival, it began to explore an electoral cartel with the CD&V which was excluded from government at the centre in 1999, for the first time since 1958 and was keen to burnish its Flemish nationalist credentials.

In January 2002, faced with polling which predicted poor results for N-VA, the party initiated talks with CD&V in order to pursue an electoral cartel in the 2003 federal elections but in the end decided to enter the elections alone, fearing the CD&V's commitment to state reform was insufficient (Van Haute, 2011: 205; Trefois & Faniel, 2007: 7). Polling in advance of the 2004 regional elections which indicated the party's performance would not improve, and may even fall below the results achieved in the 2003 elections served as the impetus for the cartel's formation (Hooghe et al, 2006: 365; Trefois & Faniel, 2007). In 2004, following disappointing results in the previous elections, both parties returned to the negotiating table, forging an electoral cartel. Together, they issued a joint programme entitled '*Flemings deserve more respect*' and calling for the transfer of a range of competences and the fulfilment of the 1999 Resolutions of the Flemish Parliament. The cartel allowed the Christian Democrats to position themselves as strong supporters of the Flemish cause and allowed N-VA access to the brand and resources of one of the most powerful parties in Flanders (Deschouwer, 2013: 341). However, the parties remained distinct, issuing separate manifestos in addition to a common electoral platform (Dandoy et al, 2013: 334). The '*Flemish Cartel*' was justified as a means of pursuing

Flemish independence, but through a more gradual means (N-VA, 2007). The cartel gained 26 percent of the votes at the Flemish regional elections, allowing CD&V to head the regional government and N-VA to enter the governing coalition as well as secure six seats in the regional Parliament (De Winter, 2011: 46-7). They were also able to amplify their demands at the central level (Deschouwer, 2009).

The salience of state reform increased, with tensions in the governing coalitions and the production of *Bye Bye Belgium*, a mockumentary produced by the RTBF exploring the possibility of a universal declaration of independence bringing public attention to the issues (Sinardet, 2008: 1023). Francophone parties remained opposed, '*demanding nothing*', which allowed the N-VA to mobilise around these issues (Sinardet, 2008: 1023; Pilet and van Haute, 2008: 548)

Perceived failures by the CD&V to take meaningful action on state reform and the growing success and recognition of the N-VA as an independent party began to take a toll on the cartel (Govaert, 2009: 63). In September 2007, Geert Bourgeois resigned from his post in the Flemish Government, placing the N-VA in opposition at the federal and regional level and able to reinforce its political ambitions (Van Haute, 2011: 205). The cartel came to an end in 2008, with the party seeing an increase in its electoral success from the 2009 onwards.

It abstained from the Leterme federal government, rejecting proposed reforms as *'too vague and too conditional'* but voted in favour of the governing coalition, with the exception of Bart de Wever who symbolically abstained (Govaert, 2009: 40). In the 2009 regional elections, there was a loss of support for the three traditional parties and a sense that, given the N-VA's success, '*Flemish nationalism is back*' (Govaert, 2012: 7). It entered into government at the Flemish level, countering critiques of its ability to govern (Andre & Depauw, 2015: 229).

Federal elections were called in April 2010 following the departure of the Open VLD from the federal coalition on the basis of the failure to deal with the issue of electoral boundaries and voters' rights in Brussels-Halle Vilvoorde. In these elections, the N-VA became the largest party in Flanders, while the Parti Socialiste remained dominant in Wallonia, leading to a protracted and ultimately unsuccessful process of government formation (Abts et al, 2012: 448; De Winter, 2012: 18). The N-VA maintained its agenda

setting function and was able to pressure traditional parties into maintaining a hard-line. De Winter described the options facing the party, either successfully negotiating a significant state reform, although one that would fall short of its ultimate goal, or:

> *'play the formation game for some time, securing that the N-VA's concessions to the Francophones would be covered by the other Flemish parties to be invited to the formation talks. And then, after some months it could blow up the negotiations on grounds that the Francophones were still not lenient enough, while the other Flemish parties would have appeared eager to make a deal with the Francophones mainly seeking office rewards'*
>
> De Winter, 2012: 18.

A pattern emerged, in which N-VA and the CD&V critiqued the Francophone parties for their failure to negotiate radical reform, while Francophone parties blamed the Flemish parties for their counterproductive role in negotiations (Abts et al, 2012: 432). In July 2011, the N-VA rejected the proposals for government quitting the negotiation while the Flemish and Walloon traditional parties, joined by the Greens, reached an agreement of in October 2011 and took office in December after the longest period of government formation to date.

The local and provincial elections were viewed as an indictment of the federal government, with state reform viewed by the N-VA as insufficient. Writing in advance of the elections, De Winter (2012: 21) argued the party would position itself vis-à-vis its Flemish rivals as the only party which could credibly defend Flemish interests and pursue confederal reforms. In his victory speech, De Wever warned Francophones that meaningful state reform was coming in 2014 and they should prepare themselves (De Wever, 2012)

Behind the party's extraordinary success sits a diverse range of voters which may cause difficulties in the future. A survey of N-VA supporters found 27% selected state reform as a very important motivation for their vote choice, with 23% selecting it as most important (Hooghe et al, 2011). The N-VA's membership was described as the least pro-Belgian party, with the exception of the VB (Swyngedouw & Abts, 2011: 15). However, supporters of the N-VA are diverse, rooted in both *'pro-Flemish community positions*' but also '*a cynical attitude towards the political system, intolerance towards migrants, rightist vision on equality, defenders of law and order solutions, and a liberal vision on the role of the state*' (De Winter, 2012:

22). There is also some evidence to suggest in 2010, it attracted voters which were more oriented towards the right and less committed to the issue of state reform (Swyngedouw & Abts, 2011: 17). Its growth can be attributed, in part, to the media presence of Bart de Wever, particularly his highly publicised media appearances (Blaise et al, 2010: 16; Casert 2011). As a result, the party must balance the demands of voters which prioritise Flemish self-government and those who prioritise socioeconomic goals. Confederalism, allowing for a gradual transition towards full self-government in the long-term, and the pursuit of policy goals in the short-term, serves as an intermediate step for the N-VA.

In just thirteen years, the N-VA grew from a marginal actor whose chances of survival seemed minimal to the largest party in the Belgian state, *incontournable* or necessary to the formation of the federal government. This extraordinary growth is considered to be the result of a potent '*cocktail which consisted of a will for political change, the leader of the party, the Flemish question, the programme of the party and its image*' (Swyngedouw & Abts, 2011: 21).

3.3.1 Self-government: short- and long-term goals

Despite its comparatively short lifespan, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie has demonstrated some movement in its self-government goals. While the call for an *'independent Flanders, a member state in a democratic Europe*' remains in the party's *Statement of Principles and Statutes* since its foundation in 2001, it has drawn a distinction between goals to be pursued in the near-term, through a process of government negotiation and the ultimate aspirations of the party (N-VA, 2001).

The N-VA's long-term aspiration of self-government involves political independence, but an independence which is never articulated without reference to the supporting context of the European Union. In its 2003 manifesto, it defined its goal as a '*Flemish member state of the European Union*', recognised like Sweden, Ireland, Portugal and Greece, suggesting a traditional form of independence (N-VA, 2003). It called for '*a free Flemish state*', '*not an island in the ocean, but a full member state in the European Union*' (N-VA, 2003). The party denied charges it was separatist, arguing that its self-government goal was not outright independence but independence within a larger European project. However, unlike its Scottish counterpart, there was no explicit discussion in the statutes or manifestos of how this self-government goal was to be achieved.

Despite possessing, at its origins, a radical self-government goal of political independence, the party suggests this would be achieved through a gradual process, employing the language of the hollowing of Belgian state, the evolution, dissolution, and evaporation, rather than a sharp break with the existing state structure. In a national day speech, N-VA member of the Flemish Parliament and then leader of the Parliament, Jan Peumans referred to self-government as an '*open question*', saying the Flemish Parliament is '*the product of a dream of autonomy*' which will be followed by the further transfer of powers as a part of a gradual process of evolution (Peumans, 2010). In a 2011 interview with the Francophone media, Bart de Wever said that the party only proposes '*the long-term evolution of Belgium, in stages*', as a result, '*to speak of a Plan B would be stupid*' (Buxant, 2012). In a 2011 interview with the *New Yorker*, Bart de Wever envisaged the dissolution of the Belgian state, '*I think Belgium will be snuffed out slowly. Slowly, like a candle, barely noticed by anyone*' (Baruma, 2011). Self-government was therefore positioned as a reasonable, moderate response to the inefficiencies of the Belgian state rather than a revolutionary proposal:

> *We are not revolutionaries, we are opposed to this sort of radicalism. No one wants to break this country, no one wants chaos. We are in support of a gentle evolution which leads to more autonomy and the strengthening of democracy, an evolution which permits Flemings and Walloons to become stronger as well as maintain the solidarity between the north and the south of the country.*
>
> de Wever, 2010.

This gradual dissolution of the Belgian state was to be preceded by confederalism. In a 2003 proposition for constitutional reform, issued jointly by MPs from the CD&V and the N-VA, this gradual nature is explained:

> *'State reform is not something accomplished once and for all.... The majority of Flemish parties has therefore arrived at the conclusion that we need to transform, at least in the first phase, the institutions of this country into a confederal structure'*
>
> Belgium Chamber of Representatives, 2003.

The party's 2004 manifesto explains this change, saying that while it proposed Flemish membership in the EU in the long-term, in the immediate term, it sought to ensure the realization of the 1999 Flemish resolutions and the transfer of core competences (N-VA, 2004). Independence, from 2004 onwards, was continually framed as a long-term goal indicating a desire to position the N-VA as a moderate party and as an acceptable coalition

partner. In 2007, again in electoral cartel with the CD&V, the party reaffirmed its commitment to Flanders as an EU member state, saying '*The ultimate goal of the N-VA: Flanders as a self-governing state in a democratic Europe*', a goal which allows Flanders to break free of an underperforming Belgium and realise its policy objectives (N-VA, 2007). However, confederalism was introduced as an interim stage, with the pursuit of the 1999 Flemish Parliament resolutions, the split of BHV, and the further transfer of important competences to the Flemish Parliament short-term priorities (N-VA, 2007).

This was to involve '*a clear, open confederal arrangement whereby the centre of gravity, both in terms of resources and powers, lies with the deelstaten. A modern democratic state is built from the bottom*' (N-VA, 2007: 8). It was described as a Copernican revolution, reversing the distribution of competences in favour of the member states of the Belgian confederation – Flanders and Wallonia. In a 2010 speech on the Flemish national day, Jan Peumans described an arrangement in which the '*constituent entities behave as nation states*' (Peumans, 2010). Confederalism was, however, vaguely defined, particularly in regards to the status of Brussels. The party was critiqued for this ambivalent position and a more concrete agenda emerged, presented to congress in October 2013 and forming the platform for the 2014 campaign as it proposed to enter into government (discussed in chapter seven).

Even while it expressed a radical goal of independence (largely between 2001 and 2007), the N-VA stressed it was not a revolutionary party and foresaw a gradual evolution and the evaporation of the Belgian state. Since 2007, independence has been deemphasised, considered a long-term goal, with the immediate emphasis focused on a confederal restructuring of the Belgian state. The party's adoption of confederalism as a near-term self-government goal signalled a moderation, a practical intermediate step which could be pursued over the course of government formation. The N-VA '*uses it to signal that it is a moderate party, gradually passing to confederalism as a step towards its final objective, an independent Flemish republic and full member state of the EU*' (De Winter, 2012: 28). This may be attributed to two factors: the position of Flemish voters, generally less supportive of Flemish independence than in Scotland and the party's framing of self-government as a tool to empower and enrichen Flanders rather than a principal (discussed in the following section) (Huysseune, 2016: 2). In an interview in the Francophone *Le Soir*, party co-founder Eric Defoort justified this, not as a betrayal of its founding principles, but a commitment to the needs and preferences of those who support them. '*The N-VA has*

no intention of betraying the million voters who placed their trust in us last June. The 27% of Flemings who voted for us did not vote for Flemish independence but for the fundamental restructuring of this state' (Le Soir, 2012). There is also evidence of divides within the party on the prioritisation of self-government vis-à-vis other policy goals, discussed in chapter seven.

3.3.2 Self-government: for principal and policy

The N-VA's framing of the purposes of self-government took two key forms, but with varying levels of emphasis. Firstly, it drew on value rational arguments, arguing the nation was an essential building block for society. Secondly, and more salient in its framing, was the argument that self-government was to serve a specific purpose, allowing for the pursuit of socioeconomic policies.

The N-VA's 2001 manifesto focused on pragmatism, describing its goals purposeful, motivated by policy objectives: *'Our Flemish nationalism is not an end, but a means by which we can arrive at more democracy and better government*' (N-VA, 2001). It denied that Flemish nationalism reflected a regressive tendency or a romantic idea of an outdated ideal of the nation-state, '*This has nothing to do with a throwback to the past, but with the future: good governance, democracy, welfare, employment and prosperity*' (N-VA, 2004). In an interview with the Francophone press, Jan Jambon, member of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives of the N-VA described the party's goal of independence, '*as not an end in and of itself. It is a means. The objective is an economy which works well, with low levels of poverty and people at work*' (Jambon, 2012). In an preface to the book *The Flemish Movement explained to Francophones* by Alain Destexhe, de Wever argues the self-government goals of Flemish nationalists reflect practical concerns for the future of Flanders *and* Wallonia rather than a manifestation of historical grievances:

> *'They also do not constitute a reaction to the cultural dominance of Francophones, nor to the claimed denigration of the Flemish people…The motivation for the pursuit of Flemish autonomy is not rancour, but a thirst for democratic governance and efficiency. For Flemings and for Francophones'*
>
> De Wever, 2011a.

This focus, on Flemish nationalism as modern, pragmatic, and policy-focused served two key purposes: distancing the N-VA from the Vlaams Belang and appealing to a wide range of voters. However, there was an emphasis on the Flemish nation and national identity

which can be attributed to the intellectual influence of Bart de Wever, who often cites scholars of nationalism in his public discussions.

1. The nation as a building block for society and democracy

Although the N-VA eschews traditional notions of sovereignty and nation-statehood in favour of a '*modern*' vision of society, nationalism remains central to its justification of its self-government goals (de Wever, 2008: 27). The nation is considered to be the building block of society and necessary for democratic functions. However, the party and its leadership argued in favour of a civic nationalism rather than the ethnic nationalism present in the Vlaams Belang. (de Wever, 2010b).

Nationalism was considered to be '*at the basis of all existing democracies',* as a *'source of solidarity which makes it possible to work together towards an inclusive society without any discrimination between people*' (N-VA, 2007: 70). Nations, according to Bart de Wever, in a 2011 blogpost '*provide the democratic structure to build bridges between communities… We cannot separate democracy from a community that serves as the basis for organization*' (De Wever, 2011a). Implicit here is a critique of the Belgian state which lacks a sense of national identity and community necessary for the functioning of a democracy. Nationalism is necessary to build solidarity within communities and as the basis for communication and cooperation between communities. '*Identity gives the answer to the question who belongs to the people and who doesn't. In that way it creates a democratic community*' (De Wever, 2011a).

The Flemish nation is defined by the party, inclusively, by those possessing '*the will, the choice, to live together*' but with an emphasis on common cultural and linguistic experiences (Buxant, 2012). Flemings are a:

> *'community of six million people formed by destiny, who can recognize themselves as players of the same team because they have a name…The Flemings have a definite territory, a common history, and a cultural pattern. That binds us to each other at such a level that we can communicate and act with each other more easily than with outsiders'*
>
> De Wever, 2009.

In the *Charter for Flanders*, published by the Flemish Parliament in 2012 although ultimately not implemented, the Flemish nation is defined as '*a social and democratic constitutional state and forms a nation with its own language and culture, with a political tradition of democracy and respect for local autonomy, private initiative and freedom of association*' (Flemish Parliament, 2012). This

definition of nationhood was included at the insistence of the N-VA.This nation is considered to be rooted in language, culture, territory, and behaviour

2. Self-government and the pursuit of socioeconomic policy

The Volksunie positioned itself as a programmatic party – pursuing self-government as a core objective but doing so in pursuit of better policy and governance for Flanders and the N-VA adopted a similar approach, although with more ideological coherence than its predecessor. Self-government is considered not an ends in and of itself, but a means to an end. Ico Maly (2016) has classified the nationalism of the N-VA as '*scientific nationalism*', focused on intellectual debates over what would serve Flemish interests rather than strength of feeling. This self-government goal is explicitly expressed with reference to the purpose: '*In its efforts to improve governance and democracy, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie logically proposes an independent Flanders, a member state in a democratic Europe*' (N-VA, 2001). This is consistent with the positions of rival parties, with an argument for Flemish self-government made on the basis that the statewide system is inefficient, failing to account for the economic and political needs of Flanders and Wallonia (Bouteca et al, 2013: 1; Sinardet, 2008). The N-VA also distanced itself from the cultural movement, speaking in favour of socioeconomic reforms, with De Wever describing Flanders as having '*achieved cultural emancipation. That is no longer part of our discourse. We're interested in democracy and efficiency*' (Baruma, 2011).

Instead, self-government is a means of pursuing ideologically informed policy goals. Confederalism was allow the Flemish confederal state to reduce the role of government, encourage personal responsibility, and pursue a migrant integration policy which stressed Flemish language and identity (Beyens et al 2015). In a 2008 interview, Bart de Wever described Belgium as '*an enormous debt, constant community fighting, large difficulties in making compromises. For Flanders, Belgium is the level where there are only problems'*. Self-government would allow the resolution of these problems. In its 2009 manifesto, it argued self-government was a means of securing prosperity for future generations.

> *'If we want to ensure that our children and grandchildren will continue to know prosperity and well-being, we have to change the existing structures. The state reform is about that, and therefore is also crucial. It has to do with tailored policies, with efficiency, with cost savings, with justice, with socio-economic revival'*
>
> N-VA, 2009.

It was also a means of ending economic transfers between Flanders and Wallonia, embedded in what Jamin (2011) describes as producerist narratives, which juxtapose the hard-working and hard done by Flanders with a dependent Wallonia. The party's 2003 proposal for constitutional reform, drafted with the CD&V, spoke of an increasingly confident and assertive Flanders '*'Flanders is not egoist or egocentric, but she is no longer a docile dairy cow*' to be exploited by Wallonia (Proposition for declaration of the revision of the constitution, 24 March, 2003). In a speech to university students in Heidelberg, de Wever argued Flanders was to Belgium what Germany is to Europe, responsible for subsidising the poorer economies of the south. '*Why does Flanders want more autonomy? Because it is tired of being the Germany to Belgium*' (de Wever, 2012).

A fundamental argument about democracy was also made, with self-government allowing not only for the pursuit of different socioeconomic goals, but also political ones. Belgium was critiqued for its undemocratic nature, with De Wever explaining it '*is not a democracy, but a partiocracy. Or, more precisely, it is the sum of a Flemish particracy and a Francophone particracy*' (de Wever, 2010b). Self-government would allow democratic improvements, ensuring voters got the government they voted for and enhancing democratic participation, an argument linked to a value rational claim that self-government was a building block.

The N-VA's emphasis on pragmatic concerns in its justification of its self-government goals reflected its ideological focus but also a strategic dimension, allowing it greater flexibility in its approach to the structure of its goals. In an article in *De Standaard*, political scientist Dave Sinardet described the denationalisation of the N-VA's discourse. '*The discourse of the N-VA has been 'denationalised' and rests on rationality, good governance and numbers. The nationalists without a nation. But with a calculator*' (Sinardet, 2009). The focus on policy rather than nationalism left it free to accept further state reform falling short of its initial goals, provided they serve the interests of Flanders. It also allowed it to modify its goals in order to adapt to changing circumstances. These policies also made the party palatable to voters who are not committed to the idea of Flemish independence, or even further state reform.

3.4 Continuity and change in self-government goals

All three parties, by virtue of their classification as sub-state nationalist parties, adopt a core self-government goal. However, we can identify variation in this goal over time.

Despite it being the oldest and most enduring of the three, the SNP demonstrated the most continuity, advocating for external self-government in the form of political independence, from its origins to the present.

There has, however, been some important variation in both the labelling of the goal, with self-government, independence, and freedom employed at various points in time, and its content, with reference to both the international context and the British state. In contrast, the Volksunie demonstrated a process of radicalisation, moving from a more moderate goal of federalisation, to confederalism, to self-government within the European Union. The VU's demand was, however, contingent on both the failure of the Belgian state to accommodate self-government and the European Union to develop sufficiently to supplant the Belgian state. Finally, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie has moderated over its short lifespan, calling for political independence, albeit within the context of the European Union at the outset, and later minimising these goals in favour of a confederal restructuring in the near term..

Table: The Purposes of Self-Government

Dimensions	SNP	VU	N-VA
1. **Value rationality and self-government**	A nation must have a state Self-actualisation for Scotland	Self-actualisation for Flanders	The nation as a building block for society
2. **Instrumental rationality and self-government**	Self-government as a means	Self-government as a means	Self-government and the pursuit of socioeconomic policy

All three parties employed a mix of value rational and instrumental rational framing of their self-government goals. Self-government was rooted in the existence of the nation but this argument was insufficient on its own. Instrumental concerns – whether social, economic, or democratic – were important, and reflect the ideological positioning of each party, but were also based on an assumption about the existence of the national

community and the right to self-government this entails. None of the three parties framed their self-government goals with exclusive reference to principles, but neither did they frame their goals in purely pragmatic terms. These justifications entailed an appeal to both the head and the heart. These findings are consistent with those of Dalle Malle (2015), who in an analysis of the N-VA and the SNP found that instrumental arguments are employed to justify self-government claims, rather than principled or remedial arguments. However, Dalle Malle perhaps understates the degree to which principled arguments are employed, a result of the fact that these arguments are often closely linked.

Together, within-case variation on both the goals and justifications for goals suggests a rationality – in response to changes in political systems, supporting structures, and economic and social conditions. The SNP, however, tends to stress independence as the natural state for a nation, rather than something that should be pursued on purely instrumental grounds. Self-government goals are likely to change in response to changes in the empirical contexts in which the individual parties operate and these will be explored in the chapters which follow.

Chapter Four: Self-government in Europe and the world

Sub-state nationalist parties do not pursue their self-government goals in isolation, but instead situate these goals in a broader environment – with reference to the party system in which they are pursued, the structure of the state in which they inhabit, and the international mileu. These goals reflect opportunities and constraints inherent in the existing system. This chapter examines the interaction between self-government goals advanced by the Scottish National Party, the Volksunie, and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie and the global and European context in which they are articulated.

By adopting a longitudinal approach, this discussion captures a rapidly shifting external context between each party's origins, two of which primarily predate European integration and the contemporary period. This includes increasing globalisation which challenges both the host state and the nations of Flanders and Scotland, the development and acceleration of European integration, the rise and fall of the Europe of the regions, the process of European Union enlargement as well as the global economic crisis and the sovereign debt crisis. Each of the three parties has engaged, albeit to varying degrees, with these phenomena, taking different positions over time.

In this chapter, I will explore how sub-state nationalist parties understand and frame the link between self-government and the international context. In doing so, I am guided by the literature which suggests parties will have differing approaches to international and European integration, depending on their self-government goals and position within a global economic and political system. (Keating, 1992; Beyers & Bursens, 2006; Dardanelli, 2011; Elias, 2008; Elias, 2011; Hepburn, 2008; Hooghe & Marks, 1996; Jolly, 2006; Keating, 2008). Keating (2001) outlines three possible tendencies of sub-state nationalist parties in response to the growing influence of supranational forces, including the European Union – those who interpret integration as an enabling factor, those who interpret it as a constraint, and those who modify their goals in response, accepting and negotiation the realities of a post-sovereign world. I argue all three fall within the third group, adapting their self-government goals to reflect these changing dynamics.

In my analysis of party framing of self-government and the external context, I examine three key dimensions relevant to the international and European sphere: (1) self-

government and the world, which considers the way in which self-government is framed with reference to the international context; (2) self-government and European integration, and the uses of Europe in the articulation of goals; and (3) international and European identities. Within these dimensions, specific frames are identified and developed within each case. They are not all present in each case, with the Volksunie paying little attention to identities, while the N-VA focuses exclusively on the second dimension of self-government and European integration. A distinction should also be drawn, in regards to the European elements, between Europe as an ideational concept and the institutions and policies of the European Union and specific aspects of institutional policy.

In this chapter, I examine each party individually, presenting a brief contextual introduction of the party and the external context and highlighting areas of variation. The Scottish National Party, with its explicitly external self-government goal of independence, is expected to pay more attention to both European and international dynamics – situating and adapting this goal with reference to the international context in which it takes place. In contrast, the Volksunie is expected to dedicate less attention to external aspects of self-government, as the more moderate goal of federalism (and later confederalism) were to be pursued within the Belgian state structure. The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, born into a world in which European integration was already well underway, and with more radical independence and confederalist goals than its predecessor, is also expected to be rooted in a European space. However, I expect less attention paid to the wider world given its insistence, from its origins onwards, that self-government would always be realised within the European Union.

4.1 The Scottish National Party: Continuity and change in the pursuit of self-government

From its origins, the SNP pursued a radical and externally-oriented form of self-government, whether described as independence, freedom, or sovereignty and as a result, it engaged deeply with the external manifestation of its goals. However, the level and forum in which integration and cooperation would take place changed over time, reflecting the international dynamics and external context in which it mobilised as well as its positioning vis-à-vis the British state and the European project.

At its origins, the SNP adopted a positive approach towards the Empire, understanding it as an external construct which would support and facilitate Scottish self-government as well as an asset to which Scotland and England, as co-creators of empire, had equal rights and obligations (MacKenzie 1993: 730). As the Empire declined, the self-government goals of the Scottish National Party were situated within the Commonwealth and within the British Isles. It defined its aim in 1952 as *'self-government for Scotland as a free and equal nation within the Commonwealth and under the Crown*' (SNP, 1952).

Although the decline of Empire removed one of the supporting constructs for Scottish self-government, the precedent of independence within the Commonwealth allowed the party to reinforce its objective of self-government. The process of decolonisation and independence within the Commonwealth was employed to bolster demands. The Commonwealth was defined as '*the more fruitful principle of a freely associated community of self-governing states*' and the recently independent states of Ceylon, Hindustan and Pakistan were to be examples for Scotland and Wales in their journey to independence (Young, 1947). Although it has little political relevance, the process of independence, as undertaken by Commonwealth nations, remains a point of reference for the party: '*the path to independence has been well mapped-out by other countries. In this century, nearly fifty Commonwealth nations have harmoniously untied the knot linking them to London*' (SNP, 1992).

European integration was more complex and dramatic changes in the SNP's position can be traced over time. At the party's origins and as the prospect of post-war cooperation was tabled, it was generally supportive of integration. In a letter from Robert McIntyre to Robert Schuman, sent in June 1950, McIntyre wrote

> *'It cannot be taken that responsible Scottish opinion supports the British Government in its policy of non-cooperation in Europe and insistence on absolute sovereignty. This latest manifestation of English Nationalism and Isolation is deplored'*
>
> McIntyre, 1950.

However, the SNP prioritised relationships within the British Isles and the broader Commonwealth rather than with European neighbours.

In the 1960s, as the United Kingdom approached membership, the SNP took an openly hostile approach which continued in the 1970s (Wilson, 2009). The leadership pledged to lead the opposition to EEC membership being imposed on Scotland against its will

(Macartney, 1990). It campaigned against membership in the 1975 referendum on whether the UK should remain within the European Communities, calling into question the legitimacy of the vote under the terms of union. It also called for constituency level counts rather than a central count which would obscure geographic differences in results (HC Deb 24 April 1975 vol 890 c822). Scottish voters ultimately voted to stay within the EEC, although at a narrower margin than their counterparts elsewhere (Nagel, 2004). In the 1979 party manifesto, the SNP set out its position on the EEC as affiliation rather than full membership, a statement which acknowledged the will of the Scottish people but also the party's desire to maintain certain components of national sovereignty (SNP, 1979)

The SNP's stance changed in the 1980s, with European membership becoming central to its vision of independence, part of a broader re-evaluation of party policy following its 1979 defeat. The party adopted a policy of *'Independence in Europe*' at its 1988 conference and was from this point forward committed to European Union membership. The details of this relationship shifted, with the party speaking favourably of the Euro, contingent on UK participation, in the 1990s and early 2000s (SNP, 1997; 1999; 2001). It advocated, in 2001, cooperation in the domains of defence, foreign affairs, trade and the environment as a means of mitigating some of the limitations of small states but sought to maintain national vetoes on issues of natural resources, taxation, and the development of a European constitution (SNP, 2001). The proposal to use the Euro was dropped in 2009 (Brown Swan & Petersohn, 2017: 71). Self-government goals were often described as '*21st-century independence*' suggesting these goals were more nuanced than traditional conceptions of independence (SNP, 2001). In the run-up to the 2014 referendum, addressed in detail in chapter seven, the party proposed European Union membership and the maintenance of relationships with the rest of the United Kingdom, a model which McEwen (2013) describes as a form of '*embedded independence*'.

We can chart these relationships through the analysis of frames. Between 1934 and the 21st century, the SNP's vision of self-government was articulated with reference to Scotland's place in the world, its place in Europe, and the identity of Scotland as both an international and European nation. Firstly, I examine conceptions of self-government and the world, which includes three key frames: (1) the changing but enduring conception of sovereignty; (2) the idea that rather than isolating Scotland, self-government would allow for further integration in the global community; and (3) the frame of normal nationhood,

which suggests the self-government sought by the SNP was not something exceptional, but normal. Self-government and European integration is a dimension in which we see more variation over time, with its framing shifting from (1) one of Europe as a threat to Scottish self-government and sovereignty, to (2) opposition as contingent, on both structures within the state and developments at the European level, to (3) pragmatic support for integration which began in the 1980s. The party engaged with the third dimension, of global and European identities, at a more superficial level, viewing Scots as a global people and contrasting this with the more exclusive identities of their English counterparts.

4.1.1 Self-government and the world: Sovereignty, integration, and normal nationhood

The SNP's proposals for self-government were always made with reference to the international context – whether the Empire, the Commonwealth, the European Union, and the British Isles. Its discussions of the international dimension focused on the importance of a modern and nuanced definition of sovereignty, independence as offering integration rather than isolation, and the idea that Scotland sought '*normal*' nationhood rather than something exceptional. These frames were employed throughout the party's lifespan, with variation seen in the context in which self-government would take place rather than arguments in favour of integration.

1. Changing conceptions of sovereignty

The SNP justified its emphasis on cooperation, whether within the Empire, the European Union, or the British Isles, by suggesting conceptions of sovereignty had evolved, becomingsomething to be shared rather than jealously guarded. Although an emphasis on a more traditional conception of sovereignty emerged in the context of EEC membership debates. In an early document published shortly after the Second World War, it argued:

> *'Final peace can only come about when the Nations are willing to surrender a large part of their national sovereignty into the hands of an international World Authority. When that day comes Scotland will be as ready as any to make her contribution towards the ultimate good of humanity'*
>
> SNP, 1945.

At the same time, the sovereignty of Scotland would '*be limited only by such agreements as will be freely entered into with other nations in order to further international co-operation and world peace*'

(SNP, 1948). Nationalism was understood to facilitate internationalism or effective and positive contributions to the wider world. '*In Economics, as elsewhere, only Nationalism will make possible real internationalism*' (Young, 1947). The party's openness was highlighted as a point of distinction between England and Scotland, and it critiqued the UK, arguing '*Narrow National Sovereignty is a thing of the past and the sooner the English learn this, the better it will be for the world*' (SNP, 1968).

The party's position on sovereignty seemed to shift as the UK explored membership in the Common Market. The possession and maintenance of sovereignty were one of the key areas of contestation in the debate over the UK's position in the Common Market. In a House of Commons debate, Donald Stewart framed his opposition largely in terms of its loss, saying

> *'Hon. Members should never lose sight of the fact that we shall lose our sovereignty. It is no argument to say that no country can be completely isolationist these days. Whether or not a country can stand on its own feet is no reason to reduce what sovereignty a country has. Why should we surrender our sovereignty to Europe and thereby be at the whim of others?'*
>
> Stewart, HOC debate, 23 July 1971

Speaking in 1974, Winnie Ewing described the European project as more than a customs union, warning '*[i]t will become much more centralised, with much more power of decision in Europe and much more loss of sovereignty to us'* (HC Deb 11 June 1974 vol 874 c1527). The ways decisions were taken at the European level, with no input from sub-state units would render Scotland '*powerless and without a voice or vote'* (SNP, 1974). The 2002 document *Principles of the Constitution* asserted the right of people to self-determination and to sovereignty over the territory and natural resources, *'limited only such agreements as may be freely entered into by it with other nations or states or with international organisations*' (SNP, 2002). It acknowledged the constraints on a sovereign nation, but argued sovereignty itself retained an intrinsic value,the basis on which participation and integration could take place (SNP, 2005). Independence as a result

> *'is not inconsistent with an interdependent world but essential to participating in it. The powers of a Nation State may evolve but being one remains the prerequisite to participation in matters dealt with collectively by Nation States'*
>
> MacAskill, 2004.

On this basis, independence allowed for integration rather than isolation within the international community.

2. Integration rather than isolation

Throughout its lifespan, the SNP repeatedly stressed independence would bring integration rather than isolation, bringing to an end the situation in which Scotland was cut off from the world through its incorporation in the United Kingdom. This framing was present throughout the party's lifespan, in a broadly similar form, but reflecting the supporting structure of the day. Its 1945 document *The Policy of the Scottish National Party* discussed the party's vision of self-government, foreseeing the future of an independent Scotland firmly within an international context. In this text, it acknowledged Scotland's status as a small nation, whose interest were best served through integration rather than isolation. It proposed the development of an effective League of Nations and the creation of a forum for collective security and foresaw Scotland acting, in partnership with Scandinavian democracies, to encourage this (SNP, 1945). The party rejected '*the narrow and restricted policies of the parish pump'*, and pledged that an independent Scotland would act in partnership with England, the Commonwealth, and with European neighbours (SNP, 1952).

In a text which tackled the myths which circulated about the SNP's independence objective, the SNP asserted independence was not separation, instead, it would '*end this unnatural separatism forced upon us by the present Union*', putting Scotland back on the map (SNP, 1968). The current state of affairs, with Scotland unrepresented on the global stage was the true sources of isolation, leaving Scotland subsumed within England and cut off from the rest of the world. Winnie Ewing described the party's vision of independence '*with an internationally minded Scotland, sitting where all other free peoples of the world sit, sharing directly in our responsibility for this fragile planet and those who live on it*' and pledged that an independent Scotland would be altruistic, peaceful, and welcoming (Ewing, 2004: xiii). In a speech to the foreign press in 2011, Alex Salmond argued:

> *'Indeed, no man is an island, and likewise, no country exists in isolation. We are all interdependent, more so now than in Hemingway's time. Each nation is connected with one to the other in a balance. And each, of course, has its own special gifts to bring'*
>
> Salmond, 2011c.

3. Normal nationhood rather than Scottish exceptionalism

The SNP's self-government goal was justified with the frame of normal nationhood – viewed as a rational desire for self-determination and self-government enjoyed by countries throughout the world, rather than a desire to promote the superiority of the Scottish people and nation. The frame first emerged in the 1950s and became more explicit throughout the party's manifestos, continuing to the present day. It suggests the SNP's self-government goals are not rooted in exceptionalism but a desire to take on the rights and responsibilities of other nations. *'It claims no more than is already possessed by an array of nations ranging from Canada to Ceylon'* (SNP, 1952). The case for independence was rooted in the ambition '*to do what every other country in the world does and take the responsibility for the government of our own affairs in our own hands*' (SNP, ca 1960s). Normal nationhood was addressed specifically in the 1968 edition of *The SNP and You*, with the party stating that *'[w]e want for Scotland what is normal for a nation— political independence with full control of our affairs, and opportunities to take the initiative in the economic interdependence of European and world trade*' (SNP, 1968). This normal nation returned in a 1978 publication, and in 1987, reference was made to the '*national and natural rights of independence*' (SNP, 1987). An independent Scotland would be, according to the party '*like most other modern democracies*' (SNP, 1987). In the 1990s, this normal status would be exercised within a European context, '*We believe that we have much to contribute as well as gain from the restoration of Scotland to the status of a normal European country*' (Scott, 1998: 91). Independence, in the view of the party, was not a revolutionary act, but simply allowing Scotland to *'become a normal nation, playing a normal part in the world' and independence being the 'normal status for wealthy small nations*' (SNP, 1997).

National status was motivated by policy goals, with Alex Salmond noting in the party's first programme for government that '*the transformation of our country in each and every of those policy areas can best be achieved through that normal, independent status*' (Salmond, 2007). Salmond returned to this theme of a normal nation in a 2008 speech, saying '*Scotland's ambitions for our nation within Europe are not any sort of anomaly or 'Scottish exceptionalism*". This desire for external self-government, or Scottish independence, shaped the party's approach to European integration, although in different ways at different points in time.

4.1.2 The role of Europe: from threat to contingent opposition to a pragmatic enabler of self-government

The SNP's position on Europe has undergone an evolution, from a positive position in the postwar years, but a sense of distance, before taking a negative position as the United Kingdom approached membership. Three frames can be identified in the party's discussions of European integration and Scottish self-government and there is a temporal component to these. Firstly, it framed European integration as a threat to Scottish sovereignty, a situation in which one foreign power would be exchanged for another. This frame predominated through the 1960s and 1970s. Secondly, its opposition was framed as contingent, embodied by the tagline '*No voice, no entry*', and employed by the party in the 1970s. This suggested under the current situation, the SNP would oppose membership in the EEC but in the event of independence, in which membership could be negotiated by Scotland, its stance might change. Finally, its position shifted further in the 1980s, with the adoption of the '*independence in Europe*' platform in 1988. This support was considered pragmatic, with European integration enabling Scottish self-government.

The party's approach to European integration is often filtered through the lens of domestic politics and Europe has been employed instrumentally to distinguish between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. This distinction is evidenced both by its opposition to European integration, which was said to be detrimental to Scotland's interests and would entail trading one distant authority for another and by its positive approach from the 1980s onwards, in which a distinction was again drawn between pro-European Scotland and Eurosceptic England.

1. The European threat to Scottish sovereignty

A column in the 23 April 1955 *Scots Independent* captured the debate within the party. It noted objections to the EEC may be rooted in the fact '*that all this only means exchanging one controlling authority for that of a whole set of nations*' but alternatively, European integration could be understood as a '*safeguard*' for small nations. By the 1960s, however, the party's framing of the European project became more hostile, culminating in the campaign for a No vote in 1975. For the SNP, Europe was a threat to Scottish sovereignty. By the late 1960s, Gordon Wilson describes a sense within the party that independence was imminent and an investment in active policy development was made. A statement of principles

published in the 1960s by the Foreign Affairs Committee to the National Council stressed the need to maintain Scottish sovereignty, stating:

> *'Scotland should avoid such political, defensive or economic entanglements as might lead to a loss of essential sovereignty which might force Scotland to adopt policies inconsistent with the wishes of the Scottish people or might prejudice her future trading position and interfere with her ability to control and develop her own economy'*
>
> cited in Wilson, 2009: 50.

Although this was not immediately adopted, it was indicative of a growing tendency within the party which emphasised a more traditional approach to sovereignty. Should the UK enter the Common Market before Scottish independence, it pledged, Scotland would not necessarily be bound by these commitments (Wolfe, 1973: 560).

The SNP at this time framed European integration as hostile to the interests of Scotland and a force which would inhibit Scottish self-government. In 1967, Billy Wolfe spoke about the risks to Scotland in the event of UK membership:

> *'For Scotland it is the eleventh hour, because if we are taken into the European Common Market as a region of Greater England before having at least a handful of Scottish National Party Members of Parliament at Westminster as evidence of the Scottish political renaissance, it will be much more difficult for us to fight our way to a position of freedom and dignity and effectiveness'*
>
> Cited in Wolfe, 1973.

The EEC was, according to Billy Wolfe '*founded on fear, on authoritarianism and on greed*' (Wolfe, 1973). Should the UK join, Scotland's sovereignty would be further undermined, leading to a scenario in which '*tiny Luxembourg will have more sovereignty than the ancient nation of Scotland which has contributed more than any other nation to the thinking of mankind*' (HC Deb 24 Feb 1970 vol 796 C1086). Donald Stewart, the MP from the Western Isles acknowledged the necessity of sharing sovereignty but warned of its loss altogether in a 1971 debate on the UK and the European Communities, saying

> *'Hon. Members should never lose sight of the fact that we shall lose our sovereignty. It is no argument to say that no country can be completely isolationist these days… Why should we surrender our sovereignty to Europe and thereby be at the whim of others. The hon Member for Paisley said that as a result of our entry the British tail will wag the European dog. What a hope! If we try that we shall find that the British tail will be bitten off, and there will be no question of our having a chance to be twice shy'*

HC Deb 23 July 1971 vol 821 c1929.


THINK ABOUT IT!!

SO WE JOIN THE COMMON MARKET,

THEN WE GET SKY HIGH FOOD PRICES,

MORE COMPETITION FOR EVERY JOB,

BRUSSELS SPROUTS - DUNDEE SLUMps

MAKE YOUR VOTE COUNT

THE ONLY PARTY THAT SAYS:-

NO SCOTTISH VOICE - NO ENTRY

The EEC also posed an economic threat to Scottish industries and the livelihood of Scots. A poster (see inset) from the 1970s warned of rising food prices and competition from foreign labour, warning of the economic consequences of entry to the EEC (SNP, 1970).

2. Opposition as contingent

Although Billy Wolfe, National Convenor from 1969 to 1979, was an outspoken critic of the European project, describing SNP opposition as '*almost instinctive*', the party's discourse and campaign reflected a frame of contingency (Wolfe, 1973). Opposition to the Common Market and the EEC were articulated not as an objection to the idea of cooperation at the continental level but a rejection of the form this cooperation took and Scotland's lack of voice within the process. This suggested that if integration were to take a different form, or if an independent Scotland had a direct voice in the process of integration, the party's position could be subject to change.

In 1966, the SNP outlined its position, viewing the Common Market as an opportunity for cooperation with Europe and with the rest of the United Kingdom. It was opposed to Scotland's entry *'as long as she is incorporated with England'*, but saw potential in cooperation following independence, saying '*An independent voice and vote in Common Market affairs would not only ensure maximum benefit for Scotland, but would also be to the advantage of our main trading partner, England*', with Scotland, England, and Northern Ireland forming a British voting bloc (SNP, 1967). This contingency was encapsulated in the motto used for the subsequent referendum campaign of '*No voice, No entry'*.

There was also an element of political strategy, with Stephen Maxwell citing an opportunity to raise the party's profile in its opposition. The SNP sought to position itself as the only party speaking with one voice, appealing to '*both the gut anti-EEC vote in Scotland*' and those sympathetic to the idea of Europe but '*sensitive to Scotland's lack of political status*

in European affairs' (Maxwell, 1975, cited in Wilson, 2009: 101). Winnie Ewing (2004: 167) explains its opposition in the 1975 campaign on continued membership *'not because we were implacably opposed to the EEC but because we felt it was essential that Scottish membership was undertaken on Scottish terms*,' citing concern over fisheries and other vital industries. Posters proclaimed: *'No - On Anyone Else's Terms*', which suggested the party might be supportive of membership if Scotland had a voice at the negotiating table (Harvie, 1998: 190).

This contingent approach throughout the campaigned allowed the party some flexibility as they sought to redefine its position following the 1975 EEC referendum and 1979 devolution referendum and subsequent defeat. Although the party's position didn't formally shift until the 1988 conference, there were signs of changing attitudes within the leadership. The 1983 manifesto stated:

> *'many of the fears that the Common Market would become a super state have been eased by experience. Far from becoming a new European despotism where bureaucracy triumphed over national rights, the enlarging of the Community in recent years has diluted some of the dangers of centralism. The bigger it gets, the looser it comes'*
>
> SNP, 1983.

Winnie Ewing won a seat in the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979 (having been appointed to the European Parliament directly in 1975) and actively engaged in the promotion of Europe in Scotland and the promotion of Scotland at the European level (Mitchell 1990). Jim Sillars' entry to the SNP, as well as a broader modernising tendency, facilitated the shift toward a more pro-European position. This frame of contingency allowed the party to adapt its position on Europe as the project became more ideologically acceptable.

3. Pragmatic support for European integration

The change in favour of '*independence in Europe'* was framed as a pragmatic choice, with European integration facilitating Scottish self-government. Sillars (1986: 189) described seeking independence outwith the EC as '*a futile waste of Scottish political energy*', with the European Community enabling self-government and cooperation with England. This positive position was adopted in 1988 and remains central to the party's independence proposals, although Jim Sillars went on to campaign for Brexit in 2016. The party noted the growing impact of the European Community on the daily lives of Scots, a reality which made it *'essential that Scotland has a voice at the top table of Europe, defending our interests and taking*

full advantage of the opportunities for Scotland' (SNP, 1989). Speaking in 1992 on the Maastricht Treaty, Alex Salmond spoke of the potential of full European Union membership for Scotland, to coincide with the furtherance of European integration, and coming at the expense of Westminster control.

> *'I admit that I am attracted by the idea—I make no secret of it—of this place losing powers to the European Parliament, to European institutions and to the people of Scotland. I want to see the Parliament of Westminster squeezed between those two elements. I shall certainly vote for the Bill.'*
>
> *HC Deb 21 May 1992 vol 208 cc509.*

Independence in Europe was a logical position, enabling independence without political or economic dislocation. European integration, according to the party, '*created a forum for Scottish independence*' (SNP, 1997). In a speech in the US, Salmond described the European Union as having '*permanently changed the nature of Scottish membership of the United Kingdom*' (Salmond, 2008). Reflecting on the SNP's changing position towards Europe, Kenny MacAskill (2004) explains the adoption of the platform as '*a necessary political change to end the perceived difficulties of separation and isolation*'. This was explicit in discussions of the currency of an independent Scotland, with the 1999 and 2001 manifestos speaking positively about the potential of the currency union. The European project provided '*a bridge to independence across the turbulent waters from the Union*' (MacAskill, 2004) but also provided a means of ensuring cooperation with the rest of the United Kingdom. It sought coordination at the European level with the states of the British Isles and integration would, according to the party, facilitate free trade and the maintenance of the social union between Scotland and England (SNP, 1997).

The SNP was not, however, uncritical of European integration and developments at the European level, positioning itself as a critical friend. It rejected efforts at centralisation, dismissing the prospect of a '*United States of Europe*' as well as the European Community's forays into core Scottish industries (SNP, 1987; 1989). It was also less supportive of the prospect of the Europe of the Regions than its Flemish counterpart, arguing

> *'At present our status in Europe is not that of a full member state, but of a region. And while we support moves to involve regional governments more fully, in the decision-making processes of the EU, regional status will always be second best'*
>
> SNP, 2004.

Despite increasing interdependence, independence was the ticket to participation in this space. The nation-state formed '*the building block upon which interdependency and international co-operation are founded*' (MacAskill, 2004: 26). As a result, the party was not prepared to accept full integration, particularly when contrasted to the positions of the VU and the N-VA, discussed below, rejecting EU control over taxation, constitutional matters, and fisheries (SNP, 2004). Its position on further integration also variedshifting on the Euro and opting out of provisions which would make continued cooperation with the rest of the United Kingdom more challenging.

4.1.3 International and European identities

The SNP's discussion of identities focused more generally on the compatibility of Scottish identity with British, European, and international ties. Scottish nationality was presumed to be open to those living in Scotland and taking part in Scottish society. In his text, *100 Home Rule Questions*, Sandy McIntosh (1966) described a '*true Scot*' as '*a Nationalist and Internationalist at the same time*' with multiple Scottish, British, European, Atlantic, and global identities. Robert Shirley, a prospective MP, defined a Scot as '*someone who chooses to live in Scotland, and values the best things in Scottish life. English, Italian, Canadian, or any other, you can be welcome and rightful citizens of Scotland*', stressing Scotland's openness to outsiders (Shirley, 1974). The party repeatedly referred to Scotland's legacy and links with the broader world. However, its focus on these identities within a European context focused on defining Scots as a global people but also included an implicit contrast with the English, who were considered more isolationist.

1. Global Scots v Little Englanders

The SNP's discussions of identities beyond Scotland focused on global reach, ties, and influence, but also a clear contrast with the internationalism of Scots, and the narrow-mindedness of the English. A manifesto from the 1960s argued '*The people of Scotland, international in outlook, learned to play their part in European culture and trade centuries ago*' (SNP, 1968; see also Ewing's contribution to HC Deb 11 June 1974 vol 874 c1527). From the 1980s onwards, Scotland was constructed as a European nation, and one which would take part willingly, in contrast to the '*little Englander*' mentality exhibited by the rest of the United Kingdom.

The 1989 European election manifesto argued a vote for parties other than the SNP would *'isolate Scotland'*, placing it at both the periphery of the UK and Europe (SNP, 1989). Scots were presented with a choice between '*integration into Thatcher's England*', and independence, an opportunity to '*free ourselves from the centralist and monetarist Thatcherite policies of Westminster'* (SNP, 1989). Independence in Europe challenged the '*sterile, out of date and bankrupt British political system and looks above it to the brighter prospects that await us in Europe and the world*' (SNP, 1997). Speaking in favour of EC membership, Andrew Welsh, MP said

> *'Scotland has always had an internationalist outlook. I mean sovereignty is actually a problem for the English. It's not a problem for us. We pooled our sovereignty with the English in a common market three hundred years ago and what we are now saying is we wish to regain that sovereignty to once again pool it in a wider three hundred million European community'*
>
> Welsh, 1992.

At the party's 1993 conference, Winnie Ewing returned to Scotland's European identity and roots, contrasting England and Scotland.

> *'Scotland on the other hand is a European nation in spirit and history. Bruce's first act was to join the Hanseatic League. Our students went regularly to Leiden, Paris, Bologna, Vallollidad. We have a Euro system of law. We had an Alliance with France for 800 years, with joint citizenship - a forerunner of the EC itself. In 1707 we got England and lost Europe. It was not a good bargain'*
>
> Ewing, 1993.

In a 1999 speech at the LSE, Alex Salmond described the UK as both '*America's poodle*' and a member of '*Europe's awkward squad*', arguing that an independent Scotland would enjoy an enhanced rather than a diminished role in the European Union. The nature of the UK's current relationship meant '*There is precious little evidence of that influence given the uneasy relationship of the UK with the rest of the community of Europe*' (Salmond, 1999). Ewing developed similar themes in her 2004 memoirs:

> *'We are frequently contrasted with the English, whose attitude in Europe has been to tell other nations what to do, rather than seek to find ways of doing things together. Much of Europe would welcome us with open arms as soon as we have the confidence to demand equality rather than subservience'*
>
> Ewing, 2004: 346-7.

In Alex Salmond's speech upon entry to government, he noted '*the people and institutions of the European Union are central to my vision for Scotland. It will, I hope, be recognised that Scotland requires to rediscover the sense of internationalism that once defined our nation*' (Salmond, 2007). This suggested Scottish identity was more inclusive and more European, than those of the English – a message to both Scots, that they were distinctive from their English neighbours, and their counterparts in the European Union. An independent Scotland, suggested the SNP, would play a more positive role.

The SNP's approach towards the international and European context was characterised both by continuity, consistently situating self-government within the international dimension, and by change, with the forum in which Scottish self-government was to take place shifting from the Empire to the Commonwealth, to the European Community / European Union, to both Europe and the British Isles, which becomes even more explicit in the party's proposals for the 2014 referendum, discussed in chapter seven. The framing of these issues was also consistent, constructed as a rational choice, reflecting the interests of Scotland and what was politically and economically feasible, rarely based on value rational claims to self-government.

As a result, shifts can be identified, particularly in the framing of Europe and self-government. European membership was framed early on as a threat to Scottish sovereignty and later as a pragmatic force which would facilitate Scottish independence. This reflected developments both external and internal to the party, including the development of a programme of a social Europe which coincided with the adoption of a social democratic ideology by the SNP (Newell 1998: 112; Harvie 1998: 200; Cameron 2010: 316; Keating, 2001: 58). European and global identities were also employed instrumentally to underline differences between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

4.2 The Volksunie: Evolving towards Europe

The Volksunie, with a more moderate self-government goal of federalism, did not engage with the international and European dimension in any significant detail until later in its lifespan, focusing on the reform of the Belgian state as an internal, domestic matter. However, when it adopted a position on the European project, it did so wholeheartedly, seeing the future of Flanders, whether as a federal unit of Belgium or as an independent

state, as thoroughly embedded within Europe. The party went beyond supporting the European project from afar, but instead developed a distinctive vision of a '*Europa der Volkeren*' or a Europe of the people. It benefited from the relatively uncontested nature of European integration within the Belgian party system (Deschouwer & Van Assche, 2008; Pilet & van Haute, 2007)

The Volksunie's self-government goals were, at their origins, internal, focusing on the reorganisation of the Belgian state to allow for autonomy over areas of cultural, social, and economic policy. The federalisation of the Belgian state was considered a domestic matter. The party, at its origins, made little reference to its position within the broader world, prioritising internal recognition. However, a link was drawn between the necessity of federalisation and the protection of Flemish cultural and linguistic identities in a European context (VU, 1954). The VU expressed some concern about the risk to Flemish language, culture and national identity of a burgeoning European project built on old states and dominated by Francophones (VU, 1955). Beyond this, however, the salience of the international context was minimal.

The salience remained low until the late 1970s when the Belgian state seemed unable to accommodate the needs and demands of the Flemish. At this point, the European Economic Community appeared as an alternative or substitute for the Belgian state, a supporting structure in which Flemish self-government could be achieved. The party foresaw the transfer of Belgian competences up to European and down to Flanders, with the Belgian state supplanted by these forces. In the 1980s, the VU developed a more distinctive, and optimistic vision of the European project, seeing the potential for self-government within a European context. As a founding member of the European Free Alliance, it highlighted its role at the European level, serving as one of the leading proponents of a European project built on regions and nations, rather than nation states. In the VU's view, the cultural and regional communities were to supplant the old states of Europe (VU, 1979).

In the 1980s and 1990s, on the way to achieving its initial federalist objectives, the VU looked towards Europe to enable further self-government. European integration presented a means of pursuing self-government goals, whether through a Europe of the Regions or as an independent member state in Europe. It advocated coordinated

European action in the domains of defence and foreign policy, environmental policy, social protection, public debt, employment standards and unemployment, offloading the core functions of the Belgian federation (VU, 1990) Its self-government goal *'a federated state of a confederation which is still currently Belgian but will be European*' was explicitly embedded in this context (VU, 1991). This Europe was to consist of a federal state, made up of '*nations and regions*' (VU, 1993). In 1993, the party opposed the Maastricht Treaty, supporting monetary union but criticising the agreement for its failure to address the democratic deficit and to entrench representation for regions and sub-state nation (Lynch, 1996; Deschouwer and Van Assche, 2008). Despite these shortcomings, the party defined its self-government goal as '*full membership in the international community, in both the European Union and the United Nations as well as in other international organisations*' (VU, 1995).

Like the SNP, the Volksunie framed its self-government goals with reference to the external context. However, European integration was prioritised, reflecting the party's focus, for much of its lifespan, of self-government within a Belgian and European context. The VU's framing of the first dimension, self-government and the broader world, took the form of (1) self-government as allowing for engagement with the broader world rather than isolation. Its framing of European integration stressed (1) the necessity of federalisation before Europeanisation; (2) Europe as an enabler of Flemish self-government, and finally, (3) a distinctive vision of Europe. In contrast with both the SNP and the N-VA, the Volksunie demonstrated little engagement with identity, whether global or European. Instead, arguments about identity were embedded in the discussion of European integration, with self-government necessary to preserve Flemish identities in an integrating world.

4.2.1 Self-government and the world: the limited salience of international issues

In comparison with the Scottish National Party, which continually referenced the international dimension when discussing self-government, the international context had little salience in Volksunie manifestos and party documents. Federalism was defined as a domestic project and the party pledged not to rely on support from elsewhere when realising its goals. It argued '*we have to solve our own problems, expecting nothing from foreign states (including the Netherlands) or international or supranational institutions*' (VU, 1957). Internal matters were to have the priority, with the 1957 congress text stating '*We must not let*

ourselves be distracted from the domestic struggle by considerations of foreign politics' (VU, 1957). The VU, like its Scottish counterpart, did employ the language of decolonisation and liberation and cited examples from elsewhere. In its 1965 manifesto, it declared '*Every person has the inalienable right to take their fate in their own hands…'* making reference to independence movements in Asia and Africa and asking *'What could be more normal than that we claim this right for ourselves?*' (VU, 1965).

1. Engagement not isolation

At the same time, the VU did employ a frame which suggested self-government would allow for positive engagement on the global stage rather than isolation. Federalism, according to the party,

> *'does not mean a defensive masonry for Flanders, but on the contrary, means acquiring the tools to enable the Flemish people to contribute to world civilization. We are not impeded by historical, ideological, party political or constitutional obstacles, which are by the way the hallmarks of the 19th century, and carries no valid meaning for the future.'*
>
> VU, 1967.

Federalism was '*not a ghetto: it is consistent with the federalist tendencies in Europe and the world*' (VU, 1968). This internationalism, according to the party, was not possible without '*Volksnationalisme*' a statement which echoes the SNP's Douglas Young, who argued true internationalism required Scottish nationalism (VU, 1979; Young, 1947). However, little reference was made to events and actors beyond the European context, although it attempted to situate Flanders within a progressive sphere in the 1970s and discussionsdecolonisation, global peace, and disarmaments appeared (VU, 1979). The party argued Belgian state reform should be aimed at providing '*Flanders the opportunity to move in international forums*' with the Flemish people and especially Flemish youth able to move freely and confidently in the wider world (VU, 1987).

These statements represent a comparatively minimal level of engagement with international issues which can be understood with reference to its focus, from its origins through the 1970s, on internal self-government and the interests of its core supporters who were concerned about cultural and economic issues rather than defining the state in the larger world. It engaged less than its Scottish counterparts with issues of sovereignty, and indeed when it did refer to sovereignty, it referred to the sovereignty of the Belgian state rather than the Flemish nation (VU, 1955). It did, however, develop a distinctive

understanding and vision of European integration and relied on European integration to support and further its self-government goals, particularly as these goals became external rather than exclusively internal.

4.2.2 The role of Europe: necessitating and enabling Flemish self-government

The role Europe played in the VU's self-government goals shifted over time. At first,European integration was framed as a force which necessitated self-government in order to preserve a distinct Flemish culture and protect the status of the Dutch language.Later, European integration was perceived as enabling Flemish self-government, replacing the failing Belgian state with a new, and more secure democratic structure. The party, unique among sub-state nationalist parties, also advanced a distinctive vision of European integration, leading the charge for a Europe of the nations but also promoting further integration.

1. Federalisation before Europeanisation

Like the SNP at its origins, the VU welcomed European integration as a mechanism for peace-keeping in the abstract but expressed fears that this integration would threaten Flemish identity. For the Volksunie, impending European integration amplified the need for federalism as a means of protecting languages and cultures against threats, necessary to '*safeguard our people's existence in the future Europe*' (VU, 1957). The status of Brussels as a national capital needed to be clarified before it was to become a European one (VU, 1961). The party's 1955 Congress put forth a motion '*warn[ing] against egotistical policies of the large states and against any premature and naïve surrender of sovereign rights*' (VU, 1955).

However, its opposition to the project was contingent on the maintenance of a unitary Belgian state structure which did not allow for the recognition and realisation of distinctive Flemish identity and structure. '*The dangers of the world as well as of a unified Europe means that the transformation of Belgium on a federalist basis, and the statute of political autonomy is urgently needed*' (VU, 1955). This sentiment was reiterated in 1957 when it stated '*we cannot help but see danger and distrust for our people in the current policy on Europe*' as it fails to '*take into account the existence of ethnic communities and national cultures*' (VU, 1957)

This emphasis on the cultural dimension also shaped its vision of the basis on which European integration should take place, linking the political structures with the identity

of the community. The VU adopted the position of early twentieth-century thinker August Vermeylen, who in 1990 argued in favour of the Flemish language and identities, saying '*We want to be Flemings in order to become Europeans*'. These identities were to be the basis on which European integration must take place. The party said it would welcome European confederation, on the proviso that it rested on '*the basis of respect for constituent nationalities*' as well as allowed for the maintenance of independent foreign policy and did not infringe on the sovereignty of member states (VU, 1955). In 1961, a resolution was passed noting '*an ethnic-federalist base is necessary for the promotion of co-operation and European unification because only federalism guarantees the survival of ethnic communities within a supranational community*', a statement reiterated in later documents (VU, 1961). They also advocated a European Senate where small peoples and historic lands could be represented (VU, 1962). This emphasis on the preservation of distinctive national identities and languages remained important throughout the party's lifespan.

2. Europe as an enabler of self-government

In the 1960s, the VU became more consistent in its support for the European project, a reflection of its more moderate goal of federalism, the position of Belgium and Flanders at the geographic centre of the project, and the broad consensus on Europe within the Belgian party system. In the party's framing, Europe became an enabling force, allowing for the delegation of contentious political issues to a higher level. The European project was continually framed by the Volksunie as an enabler of self-government, not by mitigating the costs of self-government, as in the case of the SNP, but by allowing for the hollowing of the Belgian state which would be supplanted by European coordination on international affairs and the delegation of domestic issues to Flanders and Wallonia (VU, 1973).

In the 1970s, the Volksunie began to offer more concrete proposals for the development of the European Community – rooted in both its construction of the nation and nationalism and its self-government goal of dual federalism. However, this use of the European Union as an enabler was contingent on developments at the European level. It proposed a model of self-government, whether federal or confederal, that relied on the existence and the development of the European project to fill gaps which the Flemish state could not and mitigate some of the complications of the management of Brussels.

Belgium was increasingly considered a temporary supporting structure for a self-governing Flanders and Wallonia, a construction which is also found in the self-government goals of the N-VA. As Belgium approached official federalisation, the party stated *'[w]e consider the national power as an interim transitional arrangement until the time that European integration is a reality, and communities can operate directly within the European context'* (VU, 1987). This position was understood by a former leader of the Volksunie as a rational choice, rooted in the unsustainability of the Belgian state structure. He explained *'They all want Europe to be more important than the federal level, because we want to have a house to live in when ours has burned down'* (former VU leader, interview by author, 2014). Belgian support for Europe was rooted in rational self-interest, '*If you already have a nice house, like the French and the Germans, perhaps it's a bit less interesting to move*' As a result, the party had a distinctive vision of what the European Union should become, both regarding its structure, and competences.

3. A distinctive vision of Europe

From the 1960s onwards, the VU developed a distinctive vision of what European integration should look like – one informed by its focus on democratic accountability and the needs of a self-governing Flanders. At the outset, Belgium was to serve as a model for this European project, an example of the successful coexistence of distinct ethnic group (VU, 1962) and federalism was to be the basis of both European integration and Belgian state reform (VU, 1960). On a practical level, it foresaw the transfer of key competences upward to Europe, in areas which included defence, foreign policy, and economic management, allowing Belgium to offload some contentious policy issues (VU, 1973; VU, 1984 VU, 1993). It was not uncritical of the European project and proposed reforms to improve democracy and ensure the European Community was strong enough to replace the central state. These included a second chamber in the European Parliament to represent the regions, increased power for the Parliament and Commission to undermine intergovernmentalism, a reduced role for the nation-states, and the removal of the veto of member-states. The party also supported an extended role for the European Community in social and regional policy (VU, 1991)

The building blocks of European cooperation were to be the nations and regions of Europe, which provided the '*essential framework for human development*' (VU, 1973). The VU described a multilevel system of government and political organisation, identifying three

main communities for the political organisation of society: the municipality, the community of nations and the European federation in which decisions are taken by democratically elected parliaments (VU, 1993). The VU imagined a federal rather than supranational '*political Europe of nations*', foreseeing further integration at the European level (VU, 1973; VU, 1984). This can be contrasted with the position of the SNP in the 1980s and 1990s which stressed the primacy of the member states, a status which the SNP sought to achieve for Scotland. In the VU's eyes, integration could be criticised for failing to go far enough, as was the case with the Maastricht Treaty, rather than going too far. (Lynch, 1996; Deschouwer and Van Assche 2008)

The VU's focus on a distinctive vision of Europe and commitment to further European integration, far beyond the visions of other sub-state nationalist parties, was a result of the domestic context in which it operated. European integration would allow Flanders to act on the European state, but without a decisive break with the Belgian state. The European Union would, over time, supplant Belgium while reducing the need for direct action on some of the contentious political issues, such as the monarchy and the status of Brussels.

Although the Volksunie was comparatively slow to engage with the external dimension, throughout its lifespan, the party was unique, from the 1970s onwards, with its engagement with the European project. Its goals, from this point onwards, were firmly embedded within a European context and the development of Flanders and the development of Europe were considered linked and dependent processes.

On the surface level, the VU's framing of self-government and the external dimension is characterised by change. It moved from proposing a federalist restructure of the Belgian state, focusing entirely on the internal dimension, to external self-government, whether described as integral federalism, confederalism, or independence. At the same time, the framing of its goal was consistent over time, focused on pragmatic considerations and a notion of post-sovereignty, with the old state structure becoming less important in the face of decentralisation to the nations and communities within these states and the supranational level.

The VU's consistently positive stance on European integration, even in the face of setbacks and disappointments is reflective of both the consensus within Belgian politics

on Europe as a good thing making it politically unprofitable to mobilise on an anti-European stance, but also on the party's understanding of self-government as heavily contingent and integrated within broader structures.

Europe was considered a substitute for the failing Belgian states. For the Volksunie, European integration was not a factor which merely enabled self-government but without it, self-government would not be possible. Even as it advanced more radical goals in the 1980s and 1990s, these were always made with reference to European integration. When Europe fell short of the ambitions the Volksunie held for it, its response was not to adopt a more traditional conception of self-government but to call more vocally for European integration.

4.3 The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie: Seeking an independent Flanders in a European context

While the N-VA adopted a broadly more radical self-government goal than its predecessor, it did so within the context of an integrated, and further integrating Europe. It has been identified as a unique case – possessing a centre-right political profile, seeking independence, and speaking out in favour of more European integration (Massetti, 2009). Like the Volksunie, the N-VA demonstrated little engagement with broader international events.

It did, however, place European Union membership, and further integration at the European level, at the centre of its self-government goals. While it has been, at times, vague on these goals, moving between confederalism and independence, the role of Europe in self-government was always explicit. '*It will end in whatever you name it, autonomy, independence, something, but always within the European context*' (Bracke, 2014). The party's founding documents situated its self-government goals in a European context, with article one of its statutes calling for '*an independent Flemish republic, member state of a democratic Europe*' (N-VA, 2001). According to the N-VA, Flanders was a '*European member-state in the making*' (N-VA, 2007). Like its predecessor, the N-VA sought more than economic integration, looking to the European Union to develop further, supplanting the Belgian federal state (N-VA, 2004). The goal of a self-governing or independent Flanders is always qualified by an expression of commitment to Europe. '*We have never spoken of an independent Flanders*

tout court. What one always forgets is that, for the N-VA, we want a Flanders in Europe' (de Wever, 2008).

The N-VA's framing of self-government and the international and European arena can be understood with reference to three key dimensions. Firstly, it engages less with a broader conception of the international arena but invokes the frame (1) of sovereignty as an outdated concept. In regards to European integration, three key frames come to the fore: (1) the idea of Europe as a force which enables Flemish self-government; (2) the party's critical and constructive approach to further integration; and (3) and quite interestingly, a frame which equates the problems of Europe with those of Belgium. Like its predecessors, the N-VA did not engage in any detail with European identities, operating on the assumption that the European nature of Flanders is assumed and does not need to be discussed in detail.

4.3.1 Self-government and the world: a rejection of traditional forms of sovereignty

For the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, the international dimension played a minimal role in its discourse around self-government. When the international dimension was discussed, it focused on international threats – the global economic crisis, the risk of terrorism and concerns about security, and the need for Europe to provide solutions (N-VA, 2010: 70). A purist vision of an independent Flanders, or '*Fort Flanders*' would be '*a dream that ends in a nightmare*' (Francken, 2008).

1. Sovereignty as an outdated concept

While the SNP acknowledged the challenges to the exercise of sovereignty and the necessary interdependence, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie dismissed the concept entirely. It did so by drawing a distinction between the '*19th-century nationalism'*, which '*wants to keep the world out of Flanders*' and the twenty first century nationalism of the N-VA, which builds community at home in order to engage with the world (De Wever 2008: 30). This nationalism provides '*a warm nest for all the Flemings*', promising them certainty and protection in times of uncertainty. (N-VA 2001). When asked about his vision of Flemish self-government, de Wever rejected the ideal of traditional independence, saying, '*We are not in Kosovo or in the nineteenth century. We are a member of the European Union which today decides 60 percent of our laws. We will never be completely independent*' (Buxant, 2008). In the 2012

Flemish Government publication, the Charter for Flanders, which the N-VA, as a party of government, played a role in drafting, the concept of sovereignty was largely dismissed, '*of absolute sovereignty*' described as a '*fiction*'. Instead, '*[d]ecision-making processes and policy competences are no longer the monopoly of one authority but are shared by authorities at different levels, all of them interconnected*' (Flemish Government, 2012). This formed the basis for an argument in favour of the transfer of powers up to Europe and down towards Flanders.

4.3.2 European integration: enabling Flemish self-government

The party was clear that external self-government was dependent on the further development of the European Union and it has been outspoken in its support, at least until recently, of continued integration. An intrinsic link was drawn between Flanders and Europe, '*The future of 6.5 million Flemings lies in Europe. The European Union has brought us 60 years of peace and contributes to our prosperity and well-being. Our story is and remains a European story*' (N-VA, 2007).

1. Europe as an enabler of Flemish self-government

Both the goal of self-government and the process by which it was to be achieved were articulated with reference to European integration. Given the failure of the Europe of the Regions to materialise and limited mechanisms for input by the units of federal member states, independence was necessary. '*The EU consists of states alone and so Belgium sits alone at the European table*', a state of affairs which saw Flanders poorly represented in Europe (N-VA, 2004).

A photo of Bart de Wever in front of an image of the European flag, in which one of the stars has been replaced by a Flemish lion, suggesting that Flanders would soon join those nations.

In 2010, the party situated its self-government goals firmly within a European context, saying '*Flanders as an EU member state provides the best opportunity to organise an effective and democratic self-government in a rapidly changing world*' (N-VA, 2010: 9). The embedded image shows Bart de Wever in front of a European flag, in which one of the stars has

been replaced by a Flemish lion, suggesting Flanders would one day be one of the member states these stars represent.

Although the N-VA was vague on time frame, speaking of the gradual evaporation of the Belgian state, the transition towards independence within the European Union was inevitable, as the Belgian federal state was no longer fit for purpose, having '*been overtaken by national and international developments*' (N-VA, 2010: 5). At the present moment '*The Belgian roof is leaking and should be replaced with a solid European roof over our heads*' (N-VA, 2009: 87). Europe was therefore framed as a force which both necessitated and enabled the achievement of Flemish self-government, making up for the inadequacies of the Belgian state and providing opportunities for participation and engagement.

The N-VA was direct in this frame, motivated by rational concerns about the sustainability of a small state and the prospects of European integration. The leader of the party in the federal Chamber described the European context as providing '*solutions which we should not have without the European Union*' (Jambon, 2014). Bart de Wever described his thinking before the introduction of the Euro, saying '*I used to think that if we got rid of the Belgian franc, it would lead to economic disaster. Today both parts of Belgium simply continue to use the Euro*' (Spiegel, 2010). In an interview with *Diplomatic World*, Bart de Wever spoke frankly about the centrality of the European Union to Flemish independence, saying, '*Without the Euro, the pursuit of the objective, in time, of an independent Flanders, would be particularly difficult. The N-VA is a staunchly pro-European party*' (Diplomatic World, 2013).

As a result, this was not a bonus, mitigating some of the costs of self-government, but was necessary to pursue self-government at all.

2. Critical and constructive

While in favour of European integration, both on principles and in consideration of pragmatic concerns about the viability of the Flemish state, the N-VA was more critical than its predecessor. The N-VA positioned itself, from its origins, as offering '*a critical voice to European centralisation*', demanding respect for each unit and the maintenance of cultural and linguistic diversity as well as sensible economic policy (N-VA, 2001). Its 2004 manifesto heralded the achievements of the European Union as the '*most advanced form of international cooperation in history*' but noted its shortcomings in its structure, decision-making mechanisms and policy (N-VA, 2004). The party's pursuit of its self-government goals

was contingent on developments at the European Union level, with the institutions of the European Union taking on the remaining functions of the Belgian state. As a result, a strong Europe was integral to its objectives, and setbacks at the European level were considered detrimental to the party and its goals.

The N-VA employed a '*critical and constructive*' frame in its approach towards the EU, identifying inadequacies in the set-up of the European Union, particularly in the domains of economic coordination, the regulation of the Eurozone, and its handling of the democratic deficit. This criticism set it apart from political rivals, with the N-VA characterising itself as '*the only real Flemish-European party in the country*', as it was willing to call for change rather than using Europe as a scapegoat for Belgium's ills (N-VA, 2009). It described itself as '*needed in Flanders, useful in Europe*' putting forth a Euro-realist position (N-VA, 2009). It rejected both Euro-scepticism and Europhilia, positioning itself as a party calling for European reform, a critical but also constructive position.

Although this discourse would imply a disaffection with European integration and might suggest a rejection of the European project, the N-VA did not call for less European integration but more. Like its predecessor the Volksunie, the N-VA developed a distinctive vision for a reformed Europe. Its tagline called for '*stronger Flanders, stronger Europe, less crisis*'. (N-VA, 2009). In 2009, the party remained broadly positive about Europe, proposing the transfer of further powers and seeing the European Union as a source of stability and comfort. It focused on deepening the relationship between existing member states before expanding further, ensuring the European Union was a political rather than exclusively economic project (N-VA, 2009). It called on members to '*put the European house in order*' which included further reforms (N-VA, 2010).

Both confederalism and European reforms were linked - two necessary and interdependent processes which would affect the future health and prosperity of the Flemish people. Voters were reminded that '*Europe can no longer be considered as abroad, in good times and bad*' (N-VA, 2010: 5). In his 2012 national day speech Bart de Wever was explicit about this:

> *'European integration and the creation of the Flemish state run increasingly parallel. The coming years will be critical for the shaping of our future direction. Should Europe be a debt union where economic competitiveness is undermined? Shall Flanders remain stuck in the*

> *Belgian institutional web which causes us to sink deeper into the economic swamp? Or will we choose real economic and institutional reforms…'*
>
> De Wever, 2012.

This was closely linked with a frame which emerged linking the problems of Europe and the problems of Belgium, suggesting both were in urgent need of reform.

3. The problems of Europe = the problems of Belgium

The N-VA also drew parallels between the dysfunctions of the Belgian state – divided between a productive north and an ailing south, and the European Union. In an interview with *Knack* de Wever argued '*the border between the two runs across our country*' inhibited cooperation, just like the North South divide at the European level (Knack, 2012). Europe can be understood, in this framing, as Belgium writ large. This tendency was identified by Huysenne and Dalle Mulle (2015) who note the N-VA positions Flanders among the fiscally responsible states of Northern Europe and Wallonia with those of the south, seen as '*Greece on the Meuse*'. De Wever drew these parallels '*What is taking place now on the European level is what has been happening in our country for some time. Germany must pay, but cannot make the decision*' (Knack, 2012). Germany was in danger of becoming the '*Flanders of Europe*', punished for its economic responsibility and forced to subsidise its irresponsible neighbours (Diplomatic World, 2013).

As a remedy to both the problems of Belgium and of Europe, party manifestos and statements called for two tracks of European integration, distinguishing between prosperous states of the North and the struggling states of the South and allowing for deepening integration between states which met the financial requirement and were willing to participate (N-VA, 2010). The party called for stricter requirements, noting that failing to fulfil commitments would necessitate the withdrawal of these weaker states from the EU. These messages would be more pronounced in 2014, with the adoption of a Eurorealist position in response to failures of the refugee crisis.

While the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie adopted a more radical self-government goal than its predecessor, the Volksunie, this is always framed with reference to the European context, never tout court or within a broader international dimension. This is further reinforced by the party's narrative of self-government coming about through a gradual process of evolution, with powers transferred up to the European Union and down to Flanders,

effectively rendering the Belgian state hollow. Europe, the N-VA argues, is an enabler of self-government, making this possible over time.

With a vision for self-government so firmly embedded within the European Union, the N-VA was strongly impacted by dynamics at the European level, both successes and failures. Its commitment to independence only within the European Union suggests the feasibility of its self-government goals are heavily dependent on developments at the European level. As a result, the party maintains its commitment to Europe, even as it becomes more critical of its institutions. Its framing has shifted, not towards Euroscepticism as we might expect, but towards framing Europe in urgent need of reform, beset by some of the same challenges as the Belgian state.

The crises faced by the European Union therefore present a challenge to the self-government goals of the N-VA, particularly when coupled with the minimal investment in continued cooperation with the Belgian state or Wallonia, discussed in the following chapter. In recent years, confederalism has been emphasised as the immediate goal, representing a halfway house between the status quo and independence in an unstable European structure, discussed in detail in chapter seven.

4.4 Comparing the framing self-government, Europe, and the world

The framing of self-government and the external context by each of the three parties, can be understood as reflecting key aspects of the party's policy and strategy. Changes in the external context – the decline of the British Empire, the process of European integration and the various advances and setbacks this entails – also contributed to the content of the parties' self-government goals, informing the understanding of the feasibility and desirability of various forms of self-government. The Scottish National Party, the Volksunie, and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie framed their goals in light of the international and European contexts in which it operated, although the salience of the international dimension varied between parties and within parties over time. Variation was evident in (a) processes of moderation, radicalisation, and modification; (b) each party's understanding of a changing world and concepts of self-government and sovereignty in light of these concerns; (c) and rational considerations about the party's policy and public support.

Table: Self-Government, Europe, and the World

	Dimensions	*SNP*	*VU*	*N-VA*
1.	**Self-government and the world**	*Changing conceptions of sovereignty* *Integration not isolation* *Normal nationhood*	*Engagement not isolation*	*Sovereignty as outdated*
2.	**Self-government and European integration**	*The European threat* *Opposition as contingent* *Pragmatic support*	*Federalisation before Europeanisation* *A distinctive vision of Europe*	*Europe as an enabler* *Critical and constructive* *The problems of Europe, the problems of Belgium*
3.	**International and European identities**	*Global Scots v Little Englanders*	….	….

As sub-state nationalist parties pursuing self-government goals which make reference to the international dimension, we would expect to see changes in these goals in light of changes in the context. For the Volksunie, we see a process of radicalisation, both as a result of fulfilling its original goals and therefore moving onto more radical goals, but also as the European project developed, opening an opportunity structure in which some of these goals may be realised. The European Community, and later the European Union, provided a supporting context for the Volksunie, an alternative to the failing Belgian state. As a result, its adoption of more radical self-government goals, although vaguely defined, took place as further European integration seemed imminent. The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, although possessing from its origins a more radical goal, adopted a similar framing as its predecessor. However, its commitment to European Union membership was employed to signal moderation, suggesting little would change in the event of self-government. It moderated its goal further, focusing on confederalism as an interim solution, as it became clear that neither public opinion nor developments at the European level, would support Flemish independence. For the SNP, the process of moderation or radicalisation is less clear, suggesting a process of modification. The party has always pursued external self-government, a goal of independence although it uses different

names over time, this independence has always been embedded in an international context, whether Empire, Commonwealth, or Europe. In the run-up to the 2014 referendum, this became even more explicit, with the SNP proposing the maintenance of British and European Unions.

Given its radical self-government goal, held from the outset, the SNP was more invested in concepts of sovereignty, although recognising sovereignty must be shared. This commitment to Scottish sovereignty shaped its initial scepticism towards European integration, with the argument made that an independent Scotland would not be willing to cede its recently won sovereignty to another centralised power. It also shaped its eventual positive stance on Europe, with an independent Scotland possessing sovereignty which would entail the ability to decide when and with whom to share it. Both the Volksunie and the N-VA were less invested in sovereignty, viewing it as resting with the Belgian state, in the VU's case, or an outdated concept.

The framing of self-government and Europe by all three parties represent rational understandings of the opportunities and challenges of self-government in light of the international dimension. The SNP was more value oriented than its Flemish counterparts, pursuing Scottish independence in the near-term, whether or not the external conditions supported it. This is especially true in the party's early years, in which its policy proposals were quite limited. Its goals became more nuanced as the party achieved greater relevance and felt that its achievement of its goals was increasingly likely. For the Volksunie and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, both parties framed their self-government goals in light of European developments, both institutional developments but also the ideational concept of Europe. The pursuit of self-government, was heavily contingent on developments in this domain. They also, somewhat uniquely among sub-state nationalist parties, set out distinctive visions for Europe, proposing further integration on a variety of policy domains as well as enhanced representation for regions and nations without member state status.

A discourse of contingency is present in the discourse of all three parties, suggesting self-government is subject to a process of rational calculation. For the SNP, this contingency is explicit and found most often in its discussions of its opposition to European integration from the 1960s onwards. Its position was not rooted in a fundamental

objection to the EEC, or indeed the principles of European integration, but was contingent on membership taking place within the existing structure of the state which would fail to represent Scotland's interests. For the Volksunie and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, this contingency was more veiled, with the self-government goals of both parties heavily rooted in the development of the European Union. Without further integration, the party's ultimate goals were not considered viable, although this was not often addressed directly.

Politically, the SNP was able to use Europe, and the wider international dimension, as a marker of difference between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. The party's objection to the EEC was a political opportunity to position itself standing up for Scotland and representing Scotland's diverse interests, while its adoption of a pro-European platform in 1988 was contrasted with growing Euroscepticism at Westminster, something that remains relevant in the current context For the Volksunie and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, operating within a party system in which parties could only be criticised for not being European enough, this was not an issue which could be fruitfully politicised and as a result is not present in the party's framing.

The Eurozone crisis and subsequent setbacks in European integration have had a differential impact on the N-VA and the SNP. In general, there is an implication that Flemish nationalists needed European integration more than the SNP. For the N-VA, the European Union presented a solution, both for Flemish self-government and for addressing the problem of Brussels, providing solutions to contentious issues. In contrast, the SNP engaged less with the European dimension and was less engaged with European issues, a result of the Euro-crisis having less political resonance but also the sense that the United Kingdom, and thus Scotland, remained at a distance from Europe. However, the international and European context is central to the discourse of both these parties, presenting self-government, whether internal or external, as a responsible option, providing for independence rather than isolation.

The N-VA's desire for political integration was informed by its desire, in the long-term, for a European structure to replace the Belgian state one. By endowing the European Union with foreign policy, military and security competences, it could mitigate the economic and political displacement that independence might entail. In contrast, the SNP

pursues its self-government goals in the short to medium term, framing its entry into government as a mandate to pursue independence through a referendum upon entry into office. Strategically it is required to develop and maintain a fully fleshed proposal on what independence, whether within Europe, within the British Isles, or within a globalised world means. The N-VA faced similar pressures in advance of the 2014 elections, in which it was required by its competitors to define confederalism, which until that point had been underdeveloped as a concept. The party's gradualist approach, focused on the evaporation of the Belgian state rather than an abrupt move towards independence, accorded it more flexibility though, and it could afford to wait and see how developments occurred at the European level.

Chapter Five: Framing self-government and the state

Just as sub-state nationalist parties engage with the international dimension, the structure and behaviour of the embedding state is important in shaping the content and framing of self-government goals. The centrality of the state is evident in Rokkan and Urwin's (1982: 142) definition of a self-government goal, viewed as '*the relationship between the periphery in question and the core of the state after the conflict has been resolved, as perceived by the movement*'. Accordingly, Dieckhoff (2011: 29) notes '*oppositional nationalism*' does not emerge *'in a vacuum, but through its interaction with the central state, which is itself a supplier of nationalism*' and these are expected to shape their goals.

Whether they pursue accommodation within the state or exit from it, the state remains one of the primary reference points for sub-state nationalist parties, contributing to a definition of what form of self-government is both desirable and feasible. (Keating, 1992: 45; Anderson 2007: 190, see also Clemens & Cook, 1998: 458). The literature suggests three main components of a party's self-government goals and the relationship with the larger state. The first is the nature of the state and its link with the claims made by sub-state nationalist parties, which is often used to justify the pursuit of self-government. (Keating & McGarry, 2001: 6; Hepburn, 2009: 483). This can be rooted in cultural, political, and economic grievances, summarised broadly as '*a group has suffered and/or is suffering some form of injustice at the hands of another group or state'* (Lecours, 2012: 271). Secondly, is reaction of the central to these demands, particularly processes of decentralisation which can be understood to either have constraining effects on actors, reducing the salience of their demands, or provide further forums in which to mobilise. (Rokkan & Urwin, 1982: 144; Rudolph & Thompson, 1985: 299; Erk & Anderson, 2009: 192; Alonso, 2012: 245; Detterbeck, 2012: 34; Hepburn, 2010: 28). The final component is important but relatively under-examined, and takes the form of the relationship proposed between the sub-state nation and the embedding state after self-government has been achieved. (Lluch, 2014; 151; McEwen, 2013; Keating, 2012: 13).

This chapter will assess the ways in which sub-state nationalist parties frame their self-government goals in light of the state in which they operate – whether in opposition to its existence, supportive of its reforms, or in search of new relationships. I address three

main dimensions of this issue: The first focuses on the ways in which existing state structures or the union are employed to justify self-government. All three question the utility of the embedding state and its ability to adequately represent the interest of the nation but the ways in which they frame these issues reflects the individual dynamics between the state and the sub-state nation. The second captures the parties' responses to proposed and realised state reform. Both within and cross-case variation is identified here, reflecting divides and preferences within each party. Finally, I examine the relationship with the state that the parties seek for their nation once their ideal form of self-government is achieved. Interestingly, the SNP with its more radical goal of independence, commits more energy to developing these proposals.

In analysing these dimensions, each party will be addressed in turn. In addition to presenting the frames, I will also briefly discuss the means by which self-government was to be pursued as this is contingent upon the structure and nature of each state. I then conclude the chapter with a comparison of the framing of the state and self-government in the three cases.

5.1 The Scottish National Party and the United Kingdom

Although the Scottish National Party, throughout its history, sought independence rather than being content with a reform of the British state to accommodate Scottish demands, this self-government goal was typically made with reference to British state structures. This took two forms: serving as a motivation for self-government due to the perceived threat posed to Scotland by the British state, and as an opportunity for renewed partnership and cooperation in the event of self-government. The party has also been, to varying degrees, open to the prospect of devolution or efforts to accommodate, at least partially, the SNP's demands, viewing it as a stepping stone towards self-government. State reform has been a protracted, and often stalled project, with proposals made in the 1970s but with the referendum on devolution in 1979 falling short of the required threshold. It was not, until 1999, that the SNP saw meaningful progress made towards a limited degree of self-government (Mau, 2005)

The means by which self-government was to be achieved was largely consistent from its origins to devolution, shifting only with the restoration of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.

Until this point, the majority of Scottish MPs hailing from the Scottish National Party was to be interpreted as a mandate for independence, allowing those MPs, and those Scottish MPs from other parties which wished to join, to negotiate with the UK government for Scotland's independence. The deal would then be subject to a vote by the Scottish people. With the prospect of a Scottish Assembly in the 1970s, the party outlined two routes to independence in *The New Scotland*, through the securing of a majority of seats at Westminster, and a more gradual approach from within the Assembly and Westminster, working for '*greatly increased powers for this Assembly until it becomes a proper Scottish government*' (SNP, 1974). Billy Wolfe (1973: 42) described this electoral route to self-government as '*a long road and a hard road to travel*' but one which would ultimately pay dividends. Referendums and extra-parliamentary actions were rejected as counterproductive to the independence cause (TH Gibson, 1951; HC Deb 14 January 1976 vol 903 c525).

With devolution, the SNP reoriented itself towards Holyrood and introduced a proposal for a referendum on self-government, a more realistic means of achieving its goals. MacAskill (2004: 37-38) questioned the feasibility of the party's pre-devolution strategy, asking '*How can you win in a Westminster Parliament dominated by English votes? How could a majority of Nationalist MPs deliver Independence against a Holyrood administration not supportive of it?*' arguing a majority in Holyrood would be necessary to serve as a mandate for a referendum. It was also consistent with the SNP's claim that sovereignty rests with the people, rather than the government of the day (ScotGov, 2009). Strategically, this new tactic also suited the party's renewed emphasis upon an office-seeking strategy, by encouraging people to vote for the SNP as a programmatic party, reassured that by doing so, they were not voting for a declaration of independence. '*Independence will only happen when people in Scotland vote for it. That is why independence is your choice*' (SNP, 2011)

The SNP's framing of the state and self-government took three forms. Firstly, it addressed the state and existing state structures. Within this dimension, two frames were identified: (1) the state as hostile to Scotland, used primarily until the 1980s, and then (2) as merely, as a result of its structure, as neglectful. This grievance has been rooted in concerns over cultural issues, economic underperformance or exploitation, and in democratic concerns, with these accorded different salience over time and reflects the expansion and contraction of the British state. Secondly, its approach to proposed and realised state reform also had a temporal component, with (1) initial proposals being viewed as a

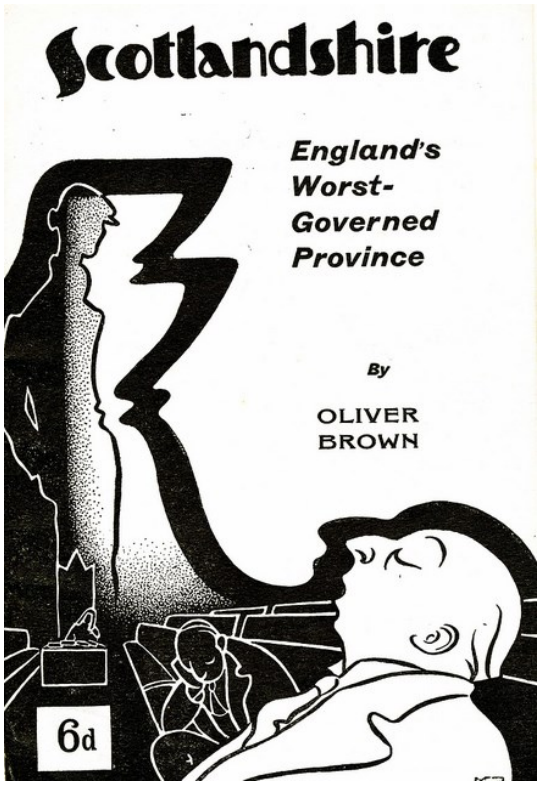
dangerous distraction, before being cautiously embraced as (2) first step towards self-government and (3) insufficient but workable. Finally, it addressed self-government and relations with the state post-independence, describing self-government as allowing for the creation of a partnership of equals, or a renewed relationship between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. This frame was present albeit in varying forms and degrees. Each of these frames will be addressed in turn.

5.1.1 The British state: Hostile and neglectful

The framing of the United Kingdom was persistently negative, with the UK portrayed as at its worst, openly hostile towards the people of Scotland, and at best, merely neglectful of its needs and interests. These dynamics represented a threat to Scotland – both an existential one, undermining the Scottish nation, and a pragmatic one, rooted in economic deprivation and democratic underrepresentation which the UK was incapable of addressing. There was a temporal component to this framing, with the frame of hostility predominant between the party's origins and devolution, replaced with the frame of neglect in the devolutionary period. By then, it was more difficult to argue that, having granted devolution, the British state was overtly hostile towards Scotland. The framing of hostility returned, to a degree, with the return of the Conservatives to power at Westminster in 2010.

1. Hostility towards Scotland

For the Scottish National Party, the Acts of Union and the United Kingdom was consistently portrayed as a historical anachronism which had failed to serve Scottish interests, and were, at times, explicitly hostile towards Scotland. Douglas Young spoke in 1945 on the failure of the Union, particularly in social and economic policy, and sabotage by '*London*' departments (Young, 1945). In the 1945 election Arthur Donaldson, the SNP's candidate outlined the challenges facing Scotland, stating '[i]*t is obvious that all is not well with Scotland and her people*', focusing on negative social and economic outcomes. He employed biblical language to describe the threat: '*All this cannot go on without bringing our ancient nation to extinction and reducing our rich and fertile land to desolation. Yet these evils are not the will of Providence but the work of man'* (Donaldson, 1945). A 1945 pamphlet, (see inset) written by Oliver Brown, who engaged with the SNP intermittently as a party member and prospective parliamentary candidate published by the party, described '*Scotlandshire*' as '*England's Worst-Governed Province*', suggesting a hostile and colonial relationship.



Scotlandshire: England's Worst Governed Province, authored by Oliver Brown suggested a hostile relationship.

In a 1952 paper on Scotland's Present Position, the party discussed this failure, focusing on the thwarted potential of Scotland as, '*subjected to cruel, stifling, and frustrating measures which are needed to bolster up the failing economy of England*', at Scotland's expense (SNP, 1952). This was, according to the SNP, a result of the structure of the British state, referred to repeatedly as a London government to emphasise its physical and practical distance from the Scottish people.

Under Billy Wolfe's leadership, the party's framing of the Union became more negative, warning of the threat of assimilation as well as continued economic mismanagement. In *Scotland Lives: The Quest for Independence,* Wolfe discussed this risk, warning

> *'it is quite clear that if the Scottish people do not assert their right to independence, there will be no such thing as a Scottish problem in the course of a generation or so, because we will be assimilated by England and what are now Scottish problems will be English regional problems'.*
>
> Wolfe, 1973: 132.

By the 1970s, Unionism no longer held any value, as '*The United Kingdom no longer means what it once meant. It is now a State that has been declining for many years*' (HC Deb 14 January 1976 vol 903 c525). Douglas Crawford noted that affiliation with England, '*one of the most bankrupt economies in Western Europe*', was detrimental for Scotland (HC Deb 1 July 1975 vol 894 c1178). A pamphlet produced for the 1974 election by Robert Shirley described England with '*her swollen population and lack of resources*' and its government as unable to address Scottish problems (Shirley, 1974). The 1979 text *Return to Nationhood* spoke directly to this legacy of neglect and exploitation.

> *'Scotland has never been regarded by the British Governments as a free and equal partner in the Union with England, but as a lesser province with reservoirs of manpower, ability, space and wealth which could be tapped as required'*
>
> SNP, 1979.

Only self-government was seen as a remedy to the threats posed to the Scottish nation, allowing Scots to preserve their culture and develop economically. Following the failed 1979 referendum, the SNP defined itself as the only line of defence against the threats facing Scotland, both in its pursuit of self-government and its willingness to stand up for Scotland under the current constitutional arrangement. This frame was evident in its appeal to voters - *'If you have any hope left for Scotland, you have only one party to vote for - the SNP'* (SNP, 1979).

This sense of hostility and the threat this entailed was amplified by the perceived illegitimacy of Conservative rule in the 1980s and anti-Thatcherite tendencies, reflecting the intersection between the state and the party system (Finlay, 2012). The 1983 introductory letter from party leader Gordon Wilson speaks of Scotland in crisis, with rising unemployment, failed industrial development, and rising emigration as a result of

policies at the centre (SNP, 1983). This frame of threat was employed to justify self-government and underline the necessity of independence. '*But there is an alternative - to choose Scotland. Never has the need for an independent Scottish Parliament and a Scottish Government been greater*' (SNP, 1983). Only the SNP could protect Scotland from Thatcherite policies, given Labour's ineffectual opposition (SNP, 1987)

Jim Sillars likens England in the 1980s to the Titanic, with Scotland, as a '*self-sufficient, small ship drawn along by a tow rope*'. While England '*has hit the iceberg of reality*', Scotland is forced to choose to cut the rope or go down with her (Sillars, 1986: 30). Thatcherism was, according to the party, anathema to Scottish interests and symbolic of the divergence of values between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom (Finlay, 2012). In Alex Salmond's introductory letter to the 1992 manifesto, the Scottish people were faced with a stark choice faced '*a choice between power and powerlessness: a choice between the dismal past and a better future. A choice to go forward into the mainstream of Europe, or to be stuck in a backwater of Britain*' (SNP, 1992). In 1997, Scotland is portrayed as overshadowed by a neighbour who '*speaks for us but not of us*', and pursues policies which are against Scottish interests (SNP, 1997)

2. Neglectful of Scottish interests

With the introduction of a Scottish Parliament, the language of threat and hostility had less resonance in Scottish political discourse. Ideologically, the SNP shared an affinity with both the Labour government at Westminster and the Labour-Liberal Democrat government at Holyrood. Having achieved devolution through a democratic vote, it was difficult to argue Scottish sovereignty was threatened or oppressed. Instead, the SNP focused on the divergence of values and the failure of statewide or '*Westminster*' parties to adequately represent Scottish interests (SNP, 1999). Salmond's 2005 conference speech remained negative about the Union but less explicitly than during the 1980s, arguing Westminster and the Unionist parties which governed there were mediocre and stale rather than openly hostile. '*But our objective is to break the grip of the London parties over Scotland – not just the political grip but their unionist mind-set of defeatism, can't do and second best*' (Salmond, 2005). In 2007, the Union was described as '*no longer fit for purpose…well past its sell by date*' (SNP, 2007).

This framing was predominant until the 2008 economic crisis, when the perceived failure of Westminster to adequately respond was characterised as a threat to Scottish well-being. This intensified following the 2010 election, with the return of the Conservative Party to power (Salmond, 2011)). In the debate over the 2010 Scottish programme of government, Angela Constance described it as a '*choice between a decade of despair, and independence*' echoing the language of the 1980s and 1990s (Constance, 2010). In his October 2011 conference speech, Salmond spoke of '*Westminster's agenda of disrespect – not of disrespect to the SNP but a fundamental disrespect for Scotland*' (Salmond, 2011). Like in the 1980s, the relationship between the UK and Scotland was viewed and framed through the lens of party politics.

Throughout its lifespan, the SNP emphasised the differences between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom and the adverse impact of Union. It did so with varying degrees of radicalism, at its origins, suggesting the British state was openly hostile or exploitative of Scotland, a discourse Hechter (1977) would label as internal colonialism. Later, it would argue that the UK state, by virtue of its structure rather than any intentionality, was unable to represent Scotland's interests. Both frames supported its proposition that independence was the only solution to this unequal partnership. Despite this quite negative framing of the British state, the SNP remained, to varying degrees, open to the prospect of devolution, at least as an intermediate step towards independence as well as continued partnership post-independence.

5.2.2 Framing state reform and devolution

The SNP struggled with internal divides on state reform proposals falling short of its ultimate goals through much of its lifespan. Paterson (2015) identifies a process of conflict and cooperation, in which dissatisfaction with the UK grows, threatening the sustainability of the Union. The UK then *'remembers its inherent flexibility and pragmatism, and concedes just enough not just to merely placate the discontent for the time being – which would be merely cynical – but actually, wisely enough appreciating what the real discontent is'*. When this pragmatism prevails, the SNP is faced with a choice – whether to embrace efforts at accommodation, at the risk of undermining its ultimate objective – or reject them, and be viewed as obstructionist.

The SNP was required to engage with various proposals put forth by political rivals and the central government, including the Conservative and Labour proposals of the 1960s

and 1970s; the model adopted by the Constitutional Convention and largely incorporated into the Labour Party's platform for the 1997 election; and extensions to the devolution settlement proposed in the 2000s. Its response to these proposals, evidenced in its framing, reflected developments and debates internal to the party, notably strategic considerations over whether a more gradual or radical strategy would best serve Scotland's interests, and the specific content of the proposals themselves.

Although many within the SNP embraced any step towards self-government, tensions existed between those who felt the party should not settle for anything less than full independence, fearing this would undercut support for independence, and gradualists, who viewed some form of limited self-government as a first step (Mitchell, 1990 Kauppi, 1982; Kidd, 2000; Finlay, 2009). These tendencies contributed to the party's response to proposals from the state and rival parties until the divide was settled in the 1980s (Cameron, 2010: 298; Mitchell, 1996: 212; Hutchison, 2001: 124).

The SNP embraced devolution in 1997 and took an active role in the Scotland Forward campaign which campaigned for a yes vote, campaigning alongside statewide parties. It continually critiqued the proposals as insufficient but pledged to work within the devolved institutions to represent Scotland's interests and pursue independence. By the first term of the Scottish Parliament, the fundamentalist gradualist split was reduced to *'little more than an easy way to describe the personality clashes and bitter power struggles still raging within the party*' (MacKay, 2009).

1. A dangerous distraction

For some members, devolution represented a dangerous distraction from its ultimate aims and a source of internal division (Newman, 1992: 18). Following a meeting in Glasgow in 1947, the SNP issued a statement entitled *Scotland demands full control* in which proposals made by local authorities and trade unionists were described as '*so ineffectual that their only result could be that Scotland's position would be worsened*' (SNP, 1947). In 1960, Robert McIntyre framed proposals for a Scottish Assembly, made by the Scottish Covenant Association as '*a parochial Westminster Committee set up for the convenience of the Westminster Parliament and is not a halfway house or even a quarter milestone towards a national parliament for Scotland*' (SNP, 1960). In *The New Scotland*, the party described proposals as a deliberate attempt to confuse the Scottish people, *'with futile fantasies ranging from the Conservatives' suggestion of some kind of puppet*

state to the Labour Party's complacency in Scotland's subservience' (SNP, 1974). These statements suggested an opposition to intermediate steps among some branches of the party. Levy (1986) documents divides within the party, rooted in the commitment of members to independence and scepticism expressed by party leaders on whether an Assembly would be acceptable.

For some, devolution was a practical and perhaps necessary first step. The debate crystallised in the 1970s around the proposals made by the Labour government for a Scottish Assembly. Neil MacCormick's 1970 essay on constitutional change noted that prior to independence, a devolved Scottish Parliament would be desirable, providing the institutional infrastructure for independence and easing the transition. Taking a gradualist perspective, MacCormick (1970) argued the devolution scheme would not preclude or inhibit independence but would instead enable it, providing a platform for Scotland and the means of pursuing policy goals. At the party's 1972 conference, a resolution was tabled which affirmed support for devolution but argued that sovereign statehood formed the core of the SNP's policy but this was not open up to a larger debate (Levy, 1986: 241).

The Kilbrandon Commission, or the Royal Commission on the Constitution, convened in 1969, issuing its report in 1973. Its recommendation was framed by SNP MPs as an opportunity, '*not as a final development but as a first stage in the process of re-establishing an independent Scottish state*' (MacCormick, 1974). However, divides persisted within the party and a distinction can be drawn between MPs and the larger party. At the party's conference in 1976, an amendment which would reject devolution was only narrowly defeated (Newman, 1992: 18). Douglas Stewart described the Scotland and Wales Bill, issued in 1976 and ultimately withdrawn, as '*only a mouse, and a very anaemic one*', warning it was not within the power of the SNP to turn it into a '*Scottish lion*' but pledging to strengthen the bill insofar as was possible (HC Deb 13 December 1976 vol 922 c1022). More sceptical voices argued the limited proposals presented a stumbling block, serving as a distraction from its ultimate aims.

2. The first step towards self-government

The SNP's 1974 manifestos, issued in February and October, attempted to reconcile these two positions, pledging to support proposals as '*a first step*' but warning they represented self-serving efforts by rivals to counteract growing support for the SNP (SNP, 1974a).

The party set out conditions under which it would support an Assembly in its October 1974 manifesto: '*The Scottish National party will support a Scottish Assembly as a step on the road to full self-government, provided it is to be directly elected and provided it is to possess significant economic and financial powers*' (SNP, 1974b).

The message adopted by MPs at the time suggested they were welcoming but wary of proposals, keen to be seen as constructive but also warning these plans were ultimately insufficient. A 1977 publication addressed the issue directly, saying,

> *'The SNP has always taken a consistent and straightforward approach to any intermediate steps towards self-government. If this involves the establishment of a directly-elected legislature for Scotland, then we will support it as a step in the right direction while continuing to work for the achievement of full political and economic powers'*
>
> SNP, 1977.

SNP MPs consistently argued there was no contradiction in their support for devolution, even in a limited form, and independence. George Reid described the Assembly as falling far short of expectations, from the start '*rammed into a constitutional straightjacket*' but at the same time, representing '*the single greatest transfer of responsibility back to the people of Scotland in the 269 years since the Act of Union*' (HC Deb 14 December 1976 vol 922 c1354-5). He asked '*Is that somewhat less than an outright position of independence? Yes, of course it is, but it does not imply a diminution of what the SNP stands for'* (ibid). Support was justified on the basis it would further, even if only slightly, Scottish interests. This position would be employed by the party to square its independence aims with support for the further transfer of powers.

Although sceptical about the potential of a Scottish Assembly, Gordon Wilson's contribution to the 1976 debate on the devolution bills seems to emphasise a stepping stone role, noting even without full powers, the Scottish Assembly would mobilise the Scottish public. Efforts to hobble the Assembly were expected to backfire. Lacking adequate economic powers, '*the Scottish people will assume that they have no choice but to move on to more certain ways of getting the justice that Scotland requires*' (HC Deb 14 January 1976 vol 903 c459). Devolution was framed as an opportunity to whet the appetite of the Scottish public for more power and convince them of both the need and ability to prosper independently. Reid argued '*This certainly is not the end of the devolution road. To use Churchill's phrase, it is not the beginning of the end but is perhaps the end of the beginning'* (HC Deb 14 December 1976 vol 922 c1354-5).

Despite these pledges of support for a devolved Scottish Assembly, no matter how insubstantial, there were divides within the Parliamentary party and the party at large. It voted narrowly to join the campaign in favour of the 1979 referendum but its campaign was lacklustre, and when the measure failed, the SNP entered a period of reflection and re-evaluation. A pamphlet for the 1979 election described devolution cynically, saying

> *'The Labour Government won the last election in Scotland on the promise of a meaningful Scottish Assembly. In the end, after four weary years, they grudgingly offered us a less than meaningful Assembly, hobbled by a unique voting rule whereby 40 per cent of all the names on the electoral roll, whether their owners were dead or had moved away, were required to decide that Labour's Scotland Act should be put into force.'*
>
> Shirley, 1979.

Following the disappointment of the 1979 referendum, a resolution made at the party's 1979 conference suggested the SNP would no longer engage in '*any more dealings in assemblies, devolution, or meaningful talks*', a more fundamentalist perspective (cited in Mitchell, 1988). However, an emerging consensus in Scottish civil society and the resolution of fundamentalist and gradualist divides over the course of the 1980s saw the party become more receptive to devolution.

The party's framing of devolution, as proposed by the Labour Party in the 1980s and 1990s, was at the outset critical, reflective of a broader process of repositioning and internal conflict, softening as the prospect of devolution neared. In 1987, it described proposals cynically, saying '*Decisions taken in London will be designed to divert Scotland's energies away from gaining real political power*', with the assemblies on offer described as '*toy-town assemblies*' with no useful powers (SNP, 1987).

In 1988, Alex Salmond warned devolution, '*right or wrong, weak or strong*' is not on the political agenda, creating a stark choice between '*a continuation of English Tory rule, or independence within the European Community*' (HC Deb 27 January 1988 vol 126 c372). Participation in the Convention was ultimately ruled out by the SNP. A statement from Gordon Wilson on 30 January 1989 explained its withdrawal, saying *'Scotland lost out in 1979 because of a rigged referendum. It is our view that the SNP cannot take part in a rigged Convention which can neither reflect nor deliver Scottish demands*' (SNP, 1989a). Rather than allowing for Scottish self-government, the proposals would *'result in endless feuds with Westminster*' (SNP, 1992).

Kenny MacAskill (2004) explains its rejection of the Convention despite initial support as rooted in the failure to include independence as an option, leading the Convention to be '*perceived as a barrier to the Party's ultimate goal'*. Devolution was portrayed as insufficient, unable to address all of the real problems facing Scotland. In its 1997 manifesto, Labour's proposals were described negatively as '*fatally flawed, and will deliver no real power*' (SNP, 1997). However, as the Labour Government took power, having made a manifesto commitment to a referendum on devolution, the SNP supported a multi-option referendum which would include independence. It later endorsed devolution as a means by which independence could be achieved. MacAskill (2004: 35) explained rejecting devolution would have been politically untenable, and '*would have baffled an electorate that would assume that the SNP would support any Parliament as opposed to no Parliament*'. This rationale contributed to the party's final frame on devolution, one that suggested that the party would work within the limited powers of devolution to further Scotland's interests and build a case for independence.

3. Insufficient but workable

The SNP ultimately embraced the prospect of a Scottish Parliament, even if it fell short of its ultimate goal, framing it as insufficient but ultimately workable, or in Winnie Ewing's words a '*half a loaf*' (Ewing, 2004: 74). The party's support was both pragmatic – bolstering confidence for independence and providing a forum in which the SNP could compete - and principled, in support of measures in the furtherance of Scottish interests. A letter to voters from George Reid, member of the National Executive Committee said, in favour of a yes vote,

> *'Scotland needs a Parliament. The SNP believes this Parliament should be Independent, free to take Scotland's decisions and to use Scotland's wealth to invest in our future. But we recognise that we must move at the same pace as the people and believe that any progress towards a Scottish Parliament should be welcomed and helped'*
>
> Reid, 1997.

Winnie Ewing's inaugural speech outlined this approach, saying '*It is no secret that, to members of the Scottish National Party, this Parliament is not quite the fulfilment of our dream, but it is a Parliament we can build a dream on*', situating devolution in a larger devolution journey (Ewing, 1999). Her memoirs returned to this frame: *'[F]or although what we have now is only*

'half a loaf' and not our heart's desire, it would have been folly to refuse it. And it would also be folly not to attempt to use it in whatever productive and imaginative way we can' (Ewing, 2004: 74).

This was challenged by the difficult early years of the Scottish Parliament, with frustrations within Scottish society at large about the Scottish Parliament building and the outcome of the devolution settlement (Mitchell, 2004: 9). There were also concerns within the SNP over electoral results which fell short of expectations, leadership, and organisational issues. In his 2004 conference speech, Alex Salmond adopted a pessimistic tone, saying '*Devolution is yesterday's news. It has not responded to today's reality, never mind the challenges of tomorrow*', using the weaknesses of devolution to advocate further steps.

Kenny MacAskill's 2004 book *Building a Nation* was designed to address some of these complexities and urged partisans and independence supporters to embrace devolution as a necessary stepping stone for independence and engage positively with the new parliament. *'For, if the Scots don't have some faith in their Parliament they won't have belief in themselves, or their Nation, never mind independence*' (MacAskill, 2004: 37). Participation at the Scottish Parliament was the only '*realistic route to independence*' (ibid: 36). The 2005 UK general election manifesto echoed these themes while identifying the shortcomings of the current arrangement and arguing for the further transfer of powers (SNP, 2005)

The success of the SNP in the 2007 Scottish Parliament election led to action on the part of unionist parties to propose an extension of devolution, as an alternative to independence. The SNP critiqued these efforts as insufficient and unable to facilitate real self-government, another disingenuous attempt by political rivals to counter the rise of the SNP. MSP Michael Russell signalled his opposition to a commission on devolution, saying

> *'The simplest and best solution to the problems that Scotland faces is not another commission, nor is it a debate on devolution. The simplest and best solution is independence, and that is the choice that the Scottish people should be asked to make'*
>
> SP Official Report, 6 December 2007, col. 4182.

The Calman Commission was set up with the support of Scottish unionist parties as an alternative to the National Conversation, designed to strengthen the union and devolve further power to Scotland (McLean et al, 2013; Arnott & Ozga, 2010). The SNP critiqued the resulting proposals for their failure to explore the possibility of independence and for

being driven by the interest of Westminster elites (ScotGov, 2009; Salmond, 2008b). It also took credit for motivating further reform, noting Calman recognised the hunger for more power but '*provided very limited nourishment*' (SNP, 2008). The product of this commission, the Scotland Bill (2012) was considered piecemeal and outdated at its origins (Salmond, 2011). However, in 2011, the partypledged to build on this legislation and improve it (SNP, 2011)

Although rejecting the notion that Scotland's needs could be accommodated within the existing state structure, the SNP accepted the transfer of further powers. In an interview, former MSP Andrew Wilson described the party's approach to devolution and intermediate steps as both a pragmatic position, furthering the goal of self-government, and a principled one, viewed as a route to independence '*Standing in the name of independence obviously is not going to get you anywhere. And jumping on the stepping stones gets you home quicker*' (Wilson, 2014). This view was consistent with its office-seeking strategy post-devolution, serving to bolster the confidence of the Scottish people in Scottish self-government and highlight the limitations of the devolution settlement, in order to increase support for independence.

5.2.3 Framing relationships with the state after self-government

Despite employing quite a negative framing of the British state and its effects on Scotland's political and economic development, the policy of the party vis-à-vis the British state rarely called for independence tout court, a complete separation and schism of the historical union. Instead, the independence goal envisaged what McEwen (2013) labels as embedded independence and what Lluch (2014) might classify as '*pactist*', foreseeing continued institutional, political and economic relationship with the British state. This took different forms over time, first pursued within the British Empire, the Commonwealth, and the British Isles but at all points made reference to some form of continued relationship within the British Isles and with the United Kingdom. It spoke of the maintenance of the social union, based on shared history as well as familial relationships, the monarchical union and some degree of economiccooperation.. This was justified as a desire for self-government, not separatism, as well as a pragmatic choice that would enable independence. Independence, according to the party, was an opportunity to recast the relationship between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom as a

partnership of equals. While dubbed '*independence lite'* by critics in the context of the 2014 campaign, the framing of independence as partnership was evident for much of the party's history.

1. A partnership of equals

This frame of renewed partnership and cooperation was present from the party's origins, with *The Case for Scotland* describing the opportunity for a harmonious, cooperative relationship: '*The interests of even an independent Scotland would still be too closely bound up with those of her sister kingdom to permit the slightest danger of what they seem to dread*' (Black, 1930). The context of the Empire and later the Commonwealth as well as the geographical realities of a small shared island, would facilitate these continued ties, strengthened '*by the fuller, more direct and more satisfying relationship which self-government would make possible*' (SNP, 1945). Its policy document outlined, in practical terms, cooperation in the domains of foreign policy and defence, participation in the Imperial conference, and a joint customs board (SNP, 1945).

In his presentation of the party's self-government goal, President Thomas H Gibson assured supporters that a '*particularly intimate relationships with the other countries of the British Isles*', including a forum for the discussion and coordination of activities on matters of mutual concerns would be forged (Gibson 1951). This is in spite of what the SNP described as '*cruel, stifling and frustrating measures which are needed to bolster up the failing economy of England*' (SNP, 1952). As it advanced, the narrative of independence under the crown became more explicit. MP George Reid looked to Norway and Sweden as a model of cooperation post-independence, with Norwegian independence fostering '*a new, more open, honest relationship*' (HC Deb 14 December 1976 vol 922 c1354-5).

The SNP proposed extensive cooperation which would allow for the development of a customs union,facilitating self-government without erecting borders between Scotland and the rest of the British Isles. However, the contemporary dependent status of Scotland inhibited these relationships, preventing a truly equal partnership. Self-government was necessary for cooperation, '*We must be equals before we can talk of progress on these lines*' (SNP, 1974). Gordon Wilson's contribution to the 1976 debate on devolution denied charges of separation in favour of equality,

> *'It is that instead of a master and servant relationship, which we have had before – with Scotland being dwarfed in this House and outnumbered by nine to one in population – we want to have proper harmony within these islands and a partnership with a new basis'*
>
> HC Deb 14 January 1976 vol 903 c525.

Its 1979 manifesto argued that rather than advocating the '*break up of the UK*', it sought a '*new relationship under the crown*' which is largely consistent with its present position (SNP, 1979). In the 1980s, Jim Sillars acknowledged that this focus on partnership might elicit concern amongst SNP activists, but argued in favour its practical function.

> *'If the SNP is to ensure that the next major constitutional debate about independence places them on the offensive and not definitely grappling with the jibe of separatism, the party will have to grasp the nettle. A continuing form of customs union with England is unavoidable. Acceptance of that reality will most definitely place constraints on our independence'*
>
> Sillars, 1986: 184-5.

This allowed the party to propose a model of self-government which mitigated some of the costs of independence As it was traditionally understood.

Until the adoption of an independence in Europe platform in the late 1980s, the British Isles was the main point of reference in the context of international integration. Some degree of partnership remained important to its vision of independence. In a somewhat contradictory fashion, after describing the British political system as '*sterile, out of date, and bankrupt*', the party described the potential for renewed partnership with the rest of the UK, with England and Scotland enjoying '*equal status as good neighbours*' (SNP, 1997). In a 1999 speech at the LSE, Salmond described an opportunity to forge a new relationship,

> *'We must aspire to a whole new concordat between the two nations, one which adds a new momentum to the process of discovering and securing the identity of both of these nations and defining the best future for both on this island that we share, and this continent to which we are tied'*
>
> Salmond, 1999.

This framing continued into the devolutionary period, and while the Union was portrayed as a negative force for Scotland, some aspects of the union were to be worth maintaining (SNP, 2007). Kenny MacAskill describes the need to cooperate on an intra-island basis,

on the principle of *Two Nations, One Island*, foreseeing continued cooperation (MacAskill, 2004: 28). As it entered government and developed a more comprehensive programme for independence, the frame of an equal partnership came to the fore, allowing for self-government but also for collaboration in areas of mutual interest and the maintenance of the social and monarchical unions (ScotGov, 2009a). Independence, according to the party, *'is about updating the relationship between Scotland and England. It is about creating a new partnership of equals - a social union to replace the current political union*' (SNP, 2010). Alex Salmond described the difference between the status quo and the independence proposals as the '*difference between partnership and subordination*', in which '*the first encourages mutual respect'* while *'the second breeds resentment*' (Salmond, 2011a).

The purpose of this framing of an interdependent form of independence was twofold: (a) from a pragmatic perspective, to avoid duplication of effort and to benefit from economies of scale; and (b) to allow for the maintenance of historical ties and the social union but on an equal footing. This was both in response to practical concerns about the structure and viability of an independent Scotland but also as an effort to reassure voters that independence was something reasonable rather than revolutionary. It was also used to counter charges of separatism made by political rivals.

The SNP employed the structure and nature of the British state to justify its pursuit of self-government. According to the party, Scotland's survival could not be ensured, and its needs could not be met within the existing constitutional arrangement. However, the Union was not entirely without value and we see this throughout the SNP's lifespan, in varying contexts. Although it sought independence, it also sought to retain some ties, whether social, political, or economic allowing for a more positive, equal relationship to flourish.

Variation is, however, evident in the framing of the prospect of state reform, or a limited form of self-government. Variation was both internal to the party, with debates over the strategic approach to proposals falling short of its self-government goals, and over time, with the majority within the party accepting a stepping stone approach to self-government. Although it has, since devolution, been critical of incremental steps, it has ultimately embraced them as a means of achieving self-government and furthering Scotland's interests, consistent with the party's two-fold objectives.

5.2 The Volksunie and the Belgian state

From its origins, the Volksunie responded to the structure of the Belgian state, which it argued was Francophone-dominated, a historical anachronism, hostile to the Flemish people and their language. Despite this negative framing of Belgium, the party's self-government goals were to be pursued largely within this state structure, with the federalisation and later confederalisation to accommodate both Flemish and Walloon interests. State reform in Belgium took place in stages, with four rounds of reform preceding the federalisation in 1993 occurring within the Volksunie's lifespan (Stouthuysen & Jans, 2011; Govaert, 1993: 31).

The fourth state reform which entailedthe federalisation of the Belgian state, posed a challenge to the Volksunie. This wasperceived to have settled the community issue, reducing its salience within the political space. The period from 1993 to the beginning of the 2000s, was characterised by a relative degree of institutional stability. What was perceived as a lack of further process created a demand for extensive reforms on the part of Flemish political actors and a commitment to the status quo on behalf of Francophones (De Winter, 2012: 17). The Volksunie, along with traditional counterparts, endorsed confederalism and set out the *Roadmap for Flanders*, published by the Flemish Parliament in 1999 (Swenden 2013: 6). Although the party contributed to the drafting of these resolutions, they called for further reform, advocating a confederal Belgium with the shared governance of Brussels, the abolition of language facilities for Francophones in the Brussels periphery, and further devolution of key sectors (de la Buissiere, 2005: 31). 2001 saw a minor transfer of powers to the region, devolving agriculture, development aid and sub-regional governments.

The Volksunie argued self-government would be achieved through negotiations at the centre and was consistent, throughout its lifespan, with its commitment to participation in government to further these goals. There was a brief departure from this stance, present in the 1962 and 1963 congress texts which proposed a constitutional referendum asking voters '*Are you in favour of self-government for Flanders and Wallonia within the framework of a federal Belgium?*' (VU, 1962; 1963). However, from this point onwards, it rejected the prospect of a plebiscite as detrimental to the cause of self-government, pledging instead to seek reform through participaton in government and respond with an open-mind to proposals which fell short, even when they came at a high political cost (VU, 1979)

The Volksunie's framing of the state and self-government took place with reference to three dimensions. The first involved the state and existing state structures, and two frames are relevant here: (1) the Belgian state as hostile to the Flemish people and (2) of diminishing value or increasingly irrelevant. While the Volksunie declared itself open towards state reform, the party framed proposals made by rival parties as (1) insufficient; (2) more positively, as part of an incremental process; and (3) as inevitable, given centrifugal nature of the Belgian state. In regards to the third dimension, the maintenance of self-government and relations with the state, self-government provided an opportunity to recast this relationship, allowing Flanders and Wallonia to co-exist as good neighbours.

5.2.1 The Belgian state: hostile, neglectful, and inefficient

Throughout its lifespan, the Volksunie's framing of the Belgian state largely focused on its deficiencies, rather than challenging its legitimacy – consistent with its focus on reforming rather than dissolving the state. The flaws of the Belgian state, highlighted by the VU, changed over time, with the Volksunie at its origins speaking of a Belgian state which was hostile to Flanders, both culturally and economically, and neglectful of Flemish interests. This claim was rooted in the economic underdevelopment of Flanders, the repression of the Flemish language, and the harsh punishments meted out to those who were perceived to have collaborated within the German occupation during the Second World War (Ladriere, 1970: 5). By the 1980s, in response to the shifting economic balance between Flanders and Wallonia, the Belgian state was declared of little value, an interim arrangement which would suffice until the point that it could be supplanted by a self-governing Flanders and an extended European support structure (VU, 1979).

1. The Belgian state as hostile

At the VU's origins, it viewed the Belgian state as hostile towards the Flemish people and the Dutch language. As a unitary state dominated by Francophone elites, Belgium could not account for the needs and demands of Flemings. This was, according to the party, particularly relevant in the economic sphere, with heavy industry, the staple of the Walloon economy, favoured over investment in agriculture more relevant in Flanders (VU, 1955). Its 1956 manifesto spoke of this neglect, painting a '*disturbing picture of decline and disadvantage*'. The neglect by the unitary regime was not, according to the VU, a class issue, but a structural condition which '*harms our nation as a whole*', through policies made for Wallonia, with little consideration of Flanders (VU, 1957). The perpetrator of this

neglect was not wholly attributed to Francophone elites, but also Flemish representatives who had failed to defend Flemish interests (VU, 1956). It warned of progressive centralization '*a direct threat to our people'* in both Flanders, where economic interests were ignored by the Francophone central state and in Brussels and Flemish Brabant *'which is threatened with colonisation*' (VU, 1961).

The Belgian state was also considered more actively hostile, evidenced in its language policy, the lack of mobility for Flemish speakers, and the prosecution of Flemings for their war-time activities. Combined, these contributed to a narrative of victimisation, with Flemings portrayed as '*victims of an anti-Flemish Belgian state*' (Art, 2008: 427). The Dutch language is described as repressed and marginalised, with French as the default. The language census, proposed as a solution to the issue of language use and education was considered a '*theft of Flemish soil, a theft of Flemish posts*', which would *'relegate Flemings to second-class citizens*' (VU, 1957). A historical process of denationalisation and the influx of Francophone migrants to Brussels was characterised as a culmination of '*a 150 year long deliberate policy of Frenchification by the Belgian unitary state*' (VU, 1961). This emphasis on linguistic parity was to subvert the traditional Flemish demographic majority (VU, 1961). The call for amnesty for those convicted of collaboration during the Germany occupation is present in every VU manifesto, although it largely faded in the party's latter years.

Self-government was a response to what the VU described as a '*systemic suppression of Flanders by the unitary state*' (VU, 1959). It would allow Flemings to '*protect our language and culture, our territory against Francophone imperialism*' (VU, 1965). These views persisted in the 1970s, as conflicts over language and resources intensified. The current constitutional arrangement inhibited this, '*If a nation does not have a sufficient degree of political autonomy, then, especially if it is a minority, it will soon be the object of oppression*' (VU 1973/1975).

Evidence of suppression and neglect served as a call to arms to Flemish nationalists.

> *'The accumulation of all anti-Flemish forces in the battle of constitutional reform and the increased Francophone presence in Brussels, cannot disguise the fact that Flanders if it really wants to, can now make rapid progress on the road to its emancipation'*
>
> VU, 1970.

In advance of the 150th anniversary of the Belgian state, the Volksunie asked '*What is there to celebrate?*', saying, '*the Volksunie wishes to emphasise that there is no reason for enlightened Flemings to commemorate the establishment of a state that has attempted to alienate us from our Dutch identity*' and remains an impediment to the development of the Flemish people (VU, 1979). By the 1980s, however, the party began to move away from the language of threat in favour of functional arguments about the nature of the Belgian state and the necessity of self-government.

2. Of diminishing value

Although the Volksunie rarely called for the complete dismantlement of Belgium, it was of diminished relevance to the VU's goals from the 1980s onwards as the party took a more radical stance on self-government. Following the failed negotiations, Belgium was critiqued more harshly, considered to be unstable as a result of constant, and incomplete processes of state reform, with crises '*following one another at an ever faster pace*' (VU, 1978). Belgium is no longer capable of managing its internal matters but is also less relevant on the international stage, given realised and prospective developments at the European level (VU, 1978).

The Volksunie would pursue self-government through federal reforms, but ultimately, Belgium was framed as transitional, increasingly irrelevant in the light of broader European integration and the development of Flanders. For the VU, Belgium was *'an interim transitional arrangement until the time that European integration is a reality, and the communities can operate directly within the European context*' (VU, 1987). While Belgium was an '*an obstacle to the further development of Flanders*' (VU, 1995), it was a temporary obstacle, both a result of external developments and the inevitability of further state reform. In the face of severe intransigence on the part of Francophones more radical measures might be pursued, justified by the diminishing '*political value of the Belgian political union for Flemings*' (VU, 1995).

The VU's framing of its self-government goal emphasised the idea of integral federalism which reflected the national ambitions of the Volksunie and the more progressive political perspective of its partner, the ID21. In a 2001 text by then member of the Volksunie, Sven Gatz definedintegral federalism as '*a bridge between the Flemish nationalists Volksunie and the radical democrats of ID21*'. Integral federalism involved '*circles of communitie*s', which relate to another in '*non-hierarchical, non-symmetrical manner*'. The key circles relevant to the

Flemish people include the commune or local community, Flanders, and a wider Europe. A confederal Belgium played a minimal role in this vision of integral federalism (Gatz, 2001). The idea that Belgium would merely fade away, overtaken by events at the Flemish and European levels, was one which was adopted by the N-VA.

5.2.2 State reform: insufficient, incremental, and inevitable

Throughout its lifespan, the Volksunie adopted a gradualist position on state reform, willing to accept concessions, even if they fell short of its ultimate goal. While it was critical of the proposals of rivals, which failed to address the root of the problem, it was ultimately supportive and willing, as discussed in the following chapter, to enter into governing coalition to pursue these reforms. It argued that while only federalism would satisfy the ambitions of the party and the Flemish people '*it confirms its willingness to cooperate with all responsible intermediate solutions, provided it does not inhibit the further development of federalism*' (VU, 1971). Like the SNP, it affirmed its commitment to self-government but also to advance the national interest, and was to supporting intermediate steps falling short of its ultimate goal, providing certain issues were respected.

The Baert Doctrine, named after VU MP Frans Baert who served in the 1960s and 1970s had three stipulations under which Flemish nationalists can support state reform: (1) it represents a significant leap forward for more autonomy for Flanders; (2) Flanders does not pay an unreasonable price in exchange; and (3) it does not complicate or stifle further steps towards Flemish state reform. This doctrine informed the party's approach to intermediate steps. There was a brief period of radicalisation in the late 1970s, with the party saying '*That page has been turned. What might have been achieved in two or three stages must be demanded and conquered in one go*' (VU, 1978). However, it recommitted itself to constructive participation in the manifestos which followed. The VU's support of these reforms was justified as evidence of its constructive approach towards politics and commitment to participation, a stance used to contrast the VU with the Vlaams Bloc.

The VU's framing of state reform, both proposed and realised, took three forms. Firstly, the proposals made by political rivals and governments were ultimately insufficient; secondly, state reform was framed as an iterative and incremental process; and finally, state reform was considered inevitable, reflecting both the centrifugal nature of the Belgian state and its artificial nature.

1. Insufficient

Early proposals by statewide parties were approached cautiously by the VU. These reforms, which largely focused on linguistic matters, were considered insufficient, they '*can only bring a partial solution, and cannot as such provide a satisfactory solution to the Flemish issue in its entirety*', failing to address economic and democratic concerns (VU, 1955). The party rejected early proposals for reform on the basis they failed to provide a complete solution and often included criteria which would be incompatible with its commitment to federalism. The party feared that they would entrench existing inequalities. Proposals for linguistic parity were critiqued particularly harshly, on the basis that they would subvert the Flemish demographic majority and failed to account for the broader economic and cultural concerns (VU, 1960).

Piecemeal solutions were to be rejected as the broader '*Flemish question cannot be solved, explained, or dismissed by partial solutions*' (VU, 1961). '*A global solution is required*' (VU, 1961). It argued '*We can only settle for a full-fledged form of federalism, based on the basic fact of the existence of two ethnic communities in Belgium*', which must be granted '*the greatest possible autonomy within the framework of a federal state*' (VU, 1961). The Volksunie rejected proposed linguistic laws on 8 November 1962 because the legislation, while successful in part, was insufficient on the whole and the party condemned the '*new unitarianism*' of traditional parties, with the 50:50 split considered a mockery of democracy (VU, 1963). In the absence of progress, it made a direct appeal to Flemish voters, focused on the individual consequences of state reform made without the consent of the Volksunie and contrary to the interests of Flanders (VU, 1965).

2. An incremental process

By the 1970s, as the VU began to achieve systemic relevance, it moderated its approach to state reform, confirming *'its willingness to cooperate with all responsible interim solutions provided that it does not inhibit the further development towards federalism*', respects Flemish territory and the rights of the Flemish community (VU, 1971). *'Substantial steps toward self-government should be undertaken, provided that they do not violate the fundamental principles*' seen in the Baert Doctrine and do not inhibit the realisation of a Flemish state (VU, 1979). This was the approach adopted even after the failure of the Egmont Pact. Although proposals made by rival parties and coalition governments were to be viewed critically and were generally

considered as insufficient, they were to be supported as a means of furthering the cause of self-government.

Belgian state reform was to be an incremental, gradual process, building on previous reforms. The party emphasised the dynamic nature of this process, the endpoint which could not be specified (VU, 1973). Although federalism was viewed as the only way forward, securing '*a true and lasting peace and understanding between Flemings and Walloons*', it proposed interim reforms on the linguistic border, the status of Brussels, and the distribution of resources (VU, 1974). This signalled its willingness to enter into coalition even if full federalisation was not on offer. Proposals were to be supported, although criticised, provided they did not inhibit further moves towards self-government and respected the duality of the Belgian federalisation.

This defined the VU's approach toward proposals in the self-government in the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequent proposals were described as '*half-hearted*', and negotiations characterised by '*bickering and twisting*' (VU, 1981). In 1981, the party portrayed itself as '*radical and realistic*', seeking Flemish self-government '*Now!*' This was a relatively brief period of fundamentalism, and while it critiqued the reforms of 1980 as '*proof that the current state structure has nothing to do with federalism*' it was ultimately supportive of any step towards self-government (VU, 1982). The VU voted with the government on the 1988 revision of the constitution while calling for more powers. The agreement on federalisation was approached similarly, with the party approving the accord while demanding further reforms, particularly on finance and fiscal transfers (Lentzen & Blaise, 1995: 18). Federalisation was regarded as '*an extremely important step in the pursuit of political independence*', but was insufficient in addressing the needs of Flanders, particularly given the status of Brussels as a region (VU, 1995).

3. Inevitable

Layered on top of this frame of incrementalism was one of inevitability. This frame was rooted in the fact that the Belgian state had been overtaken by events and further reform, ending in self-government, was inevitable (VU, 1978).

The party's 1995 manifesto addressed this challenge directly, in an attempt to situate itself within this new system, saying '*Now begins another job…*' to use the powers transferred to Flanders to address social and political issues (VU, 1995). Constitutional reform,

according to the VU is '*not a single event, but in dynamic, continuous motion*' (VU, 1995). It also called, with coalition partners, for the further transfer of powers through the 1999 Resolutions of the Flemish Parliament, described as an '*institutional shopping list*' (de la Buissiere, 2005: 34). They called for further transfers beyond the 1999 agreement, including a confederal Belgium and the abolition of language facilities for Francophones in the Brussels periphery (Deshouwer, 2013: 340).

The VU was willing to accept more limited steps towards its ultimate goal, arguing self-government was inevitable, and a result of the centrifugal nature of the Belgian state as well as the inefficiencies of the current arrangement. Although the VU was often vague on its ultimate aspirations for Flemish self-government, it was clear throughout its lifespan that self-government was a matter of when and not if, inevitable given the structure of the Belgian state as well as developments above the Belgian level. The process by which state reform had taken place in Belgium, through incremental changes, reinforced this sense of inevitability and allowed the party a certain degree of flexibility to support interim reforms, enter into government, and frame its role within the overall process.

5.2.3 The state after self-government: good neighbours

Discussions of relations between the centre and Flanders and Flanders and Wallonia after self-government were largely absent from the Volksunie's manifestos, which is surprising particularly considering the relatively moderate self-government goals pursued by the Volksunie. While this was implicit in its model of self-government, it received comparatively little attention in manifestos, particularly when compared with those of the SNP. Instead, its proposals focused, throughout its lifespan, on ways in which separating powers and functions would allow for the peaceful coexistence, largely living separately. The party argued '*Only federalism can put an end to the constant national conflict between the peoples, as well as the paralysis and compromise imposed*' (VU, 1962). By dividing responsibilities, federalism was portrayed as enabling a *'true and lasting peace and understanding between Flemings and Walloons*' and improving democratic representation (VU, 1974).

1. Good neighbours

The VU, at various points in its lifespan, employed a domestic metaphor to characterise the Belgian union and its self-government goals – a house divided with no one satisfied

with the status quo which should be replaced by a model of amicable separation. The VU describes a process in which Flanders and Wallonia have grown apart

> *'Now the two communities are so strongly manifest in their own being and show clear differences in their own opinions that a unitary government is no longer acceptable…only federalism can put an end to the constant nationalist conflict between peoples, as well as the paralysis and compromises imposed'*
>
> VU, 1960.

Belgium was now a '*house in which Flemings and Walloons huddle together and quarrel*' (VU, 1965).

Building on this language of domesticity, the VU proposed a federal arrangement, renovating this house in which Flanders and Wallonia would share '*a single roof, behind a single façade*' but would '*live as they like in their own apartments*' (VU, 1965). The VU focused on allowing both communities to go about their own business, under a single Belgian roof, but living largely independently (VU, 1965). The renovation of the Belgian state along federal lines would provide both the ability to pursue their individual interests and a common forum in which cooperation could take place, '*as good neighbours*' and a strong sense of autonomy (VU, 1974).

Self-government, as proposed by the VU, would allow for Flanders and Wallonia to be '*good neighbours*' but ones who lived largely separate lives (VU, 1974). In this confederal structure, cooperation should be optional rather than required, motivated by '*enlightened self-interest and neighbourliness*' (VU, 1981). This arrangement would render Flanders *'master of its own house, of its own territory, over its own resources*' (VU, 1987). Its proposed confederal structure would allow for neighbourliness, but also, if necessary, a framework through which an amicable dissolution of the relationship could take place. *'If one of the partners does not respect the rules, the confederal structure is the best vehicle with which to proceed with the disintegration of the economic and monetary union*' (VU, 1985). In sum, self-government would allow for peaceful coexistence and divorce if necessary, rather than the renewal or restoration of relationships between Flanders and Wallonia.

In the party's 1995 manifesto and the manifesto issued jointly in 1999 with ID21 in a progressive coalition, it appeared to disregard the Belgian state structure altogether, speaking of the key '*circles*' or communities as the local area, the Flemish nation, and the European state, with no reference to Belgium (VU, 1995, VU &ID21, 1999). This can be

understood to reflect two key tendencies of the party – the sense that Flemish self-government, within a European context, was an inevitability and the sense that the Belgian state was inefficient and ineffectual.

The Volksunie's framing of the Belgian state, the prospects of state reform, and the relationship between Flanders and the larger state was broadly consistent over time. Belgium was failing to serve the interests of Flanders, a deficiency which necessitated self-government, and further reforms were inevitable. The party did however, take a gradualist approach to self-government, with the exception of the period which followed the failure of the Egmont Pact. It was, throughout its lifespan, open to any reasonable intermediate steps which would benefit Flanders and allow for further reform. The centrifugal dynamic of Belgian state reform allowed any concessions to be viewed as stepping stones towards self-government. What the party failed to address in detail, which is particularly striking in contrast with the SNP, was the relationship between Flanders and Wallonia, and Flanders and the federal or confederal Belgium, once the party's goals were achieved. This can be understood in light of the self-government goal held by the party, often ambiguous, and the sense that self-government would evolve, and did not require immediate clarification.

The Volksunie's positioning set the stage for its successor, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. While the N-VA adopted a more radical self-government goal, it employed a similar language of evolution and inevitability, rather than calling for a radical break.

5.3 The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie and the Belgian state

The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie emerged at a time of relative institutional stability, after three decades of protracted constitutional change, and in its first election, struggled to mobilise the electorate with its calls for self-government. The collapse of the Volksunie suggested that Flemish self-government would be carried forward by mainstream parties (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009: 295). The Lambermont and Lombard Accords came into effect in 2001 and entailed relatively minor transfers of powers in a variety of domains (Delwit & Hellings, 2002). While there was a consensus among the Flemish parties on the need for further reforms, taking the form of the 1999 resolutions of the Flemish Parliament, these were met with a Francophone preference for the status quo (de la Burssiere, 2005: 31; Sinardet, 2008: 1023).

However, the future of Belgium returned to the spotlight following the 2007 federal elections, in which the Flemish CD&V and N-VA cartel received 18.5% of the total Belgian vote. The coalition negotiations which followed contributed to a narrativeperpetuated by politicians and the media that Belgium was in a period of crisis. This was exacerbated by the larger financial crisis and an even longer period of government formation following the 2010 elections (Rochtus, 2012: 278).

Like its predecessor, the N-VA committed to pursuing self-government within the traditional structure of the Belgian state, through the process of negotiation at the centre rather than through a referendum or action at the Flemish Parliamentary level. Despite possessing, at its origins, the more radical self-government goal of political independence, the N-VA suggested this would be achieved through a gradual process, employing the language of the hollowing of Belgian state, the evolution, dissolution, and evaporation, rather than a sharp break with the existing state structure. The means by which self-government was to be pursued has rarely been made explicit by the N-VA, and means used by other parties, including referendums, have been dismissed as incompatible with the nature of Flemish democracy and Belgian political tradition.

Confederalism, as the N-VA's near-term goal, was to be pursued through the entry into a federal governing coalition by the N-VA, which would negotiate far-reaching reforms as part of the process of government formation. The goal of independence within the European Union was to follow, but the process by which this would happen was abstract. The party argued '*We believe that Flanders must evolve into a European member state. Over time, the Belgian level will evaporate'* (N-VA, 2010: 5). In a 2010 speech in the Flemish Parliament, Jan Peumans referred to the party's self-government goal as an '*open question*', saying the Flemish Parliament is '*the product of a dream of autonomy*' which will be followed by the further transfer of powers as a part of a gradual process of evolution (Peumans, 2010). Bart de Wever described this process, '*I think Belgium will be snuffed out slowly. Slowly, like a candle, barely noticed by anyone*' (Baruma, 2010). Independence, therefore, was not to be pursued directly, but passively, as a result of an organic process rather than the action of the N-VA.

The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie's framing of the Belgian state and Flemish self-government engaged with the three dimensions identified at the outset and found in the other cases.

The Belgian state and its structures were framed as (1) artificial, lacking in substance and (2) inefficient and increasingly irrelevant. This framing was more negative than that of its predecessor. Proposed and realised state reforms were viewed as (1) a futile effort, or too little, too late to save a federal Belgium. The party offered a distinct vision of self-government and relations between Flanders and Wallonia within the context of a confederal structure, viewing it as (1) in the near term, a letterbox for Flanders and Wallonia but (2) ultimately disappearing.

5.3.1The Belgian state: artificial and inefficient

The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie's language around the Belgian state was more hostile than its predecessor and it focused on two key arguments: firstly, that Belgium was artificial and secondly, that the Belgian state was inefficient and increasingly irrelevant, an argument also employed by the Volksunie. This frame was further bolstered by European integration and the economic crisis. The N-VA argued it was the only one brave enough to make these critiques, saying '*The separation of the minds has long been there, but one dares not face the facts. The N-VA is not plagued by this conservative tendency, nor by the fear of new, future challenges*' (N-VA, 2003). These arguments about the artificiality and inefficiency of the Belgian state were used to substantiate the N-VA's position that Belgium, as a moribund institution, should gradually fade away (Baruma, 2010).

1. Belgium as an artificial construct

The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie has consistently employed an argument which sees the Belgian state characterised as a historical accident rather than as a genuine nation,therefore destined for failure. De Wever described the origin and history of Belgium in this historical context. Belgium is portrayed, not as a proper union, but as a '*sum of two democracies*', accidentally joined by an accident of history and dominated by Francophones (de Wever, cited in Rochtus, 2012). This language of historical accident is pervasive within the party, repeated in manifestos as well as in interviews conducted as part of this research. Farhat et al. demonstrate that the framing of Belgium as an artificial state is not unique to the N-VA but is more widespread among Flemish parties which employ the past '*to corroborate the idea that the end of Belgium is logical since its creation was – symmetrically – artificial*' (Farhat et al, 2015). However, it is the N-VA which continually stresses this narrative as a way of bolstering support for Flemish self-government, as evidenced by nearly all interviews conducted over the course of this research with representatives of the N-VA.

This historical accident has resulted in a deeply divided and artificial society, lacking the necessary common ground to govern together. De Wever argued Belgium was '*a land with different democracies, different public opinions, different media*' (Brand, 2010). Historical and contemporary differences resulted in a '*separation of minds*' (N-VA, 2003). In a 2010 speech on the Flemish national day Jan Peumans, the N-VA leader in the Flemish Parliament, described the markers of national identity, nationalism, and nation building. Before addressing the '*problem*' of Belgium, which lacked a common nation-state or national project. Peumans argued '*In the European Union, nation-states rule. Belgium is the exception*' (Peumans, 2010). As a result, the '*objective basis*' for Belgium has been removed through a process of unravelling of the two communities, culturally, socially, economically, and democratically (de Wever, 2011a). Bart de Wever described Belgium as '*a permanent diplomatic conference*', with no common ground on which to build a shared identity. (de Wever, 2010a).

> *'The unravelling of the communities culturally, socially, economically, and democratically, now loose or completely separate from one another, has washed away the objective basis for the Belgian nation. The subjective basis, the will to form one community, is more present but comes less from classic patriotism than from nurturing Belgium as a non-nation, a country bound mainly by surrealism'*
>
> De Wever, 2011a.

Employing this language of Surrealism, de Wever characterises Belgium, saying she '*exists but she exists no longer*' (Buxant, 2008). Although the N-VA rejects traditional conceptions of sovereignty and positions itself as a civic nationalist party, the characterisation of the Belgian state as artificial because of its diversity, suggests a traditional viewpoint in which nation and state should be congruent.

2. Inefficient and irrelevant

In addition to its artificiality, Belgium is inefficient, by virtue of the piecemeal processes of reform and the absence of a cohesive demos, and in light of competing structures, increasingly irrelevant. While the Volksunie focused, at its origins on issues of cultural oppression, economic neglect, and underdevelopment, before shifting to concerns about democratic representation and efficiency, from the outset, the N-VA stressed the inefficiencies of the Belgian state and its failure to serve Flemish interests. These failures are attributed to the labyrinthine structures of the Belgian state, which sees the

proliferation of governmental bureaucracy and red tape and detrimental transfers between Flanders and Wallonia.

In the party's 2003 manifesto, Belgium was viewed as blocked, inhibiting the welfare and well-being of both Flemings and Walloons, and it called for '*Flemish solutions instead of Belgian blocks*', arguing in favour of the transfer of taxation, economic policy, employment policy, and health and family policy (N-VA, 2003). Belgium was by its problems, underscoring the need for radical reform. In a 2008 interview, Bart de Wever described Belgium as '*an enormous debt, constant community fighting, large difficulties in making compromises. For Flanders, Belgium is the level where there are only problems'* (Buxant, 2008). The construction of this discussion is of particular interest, with Belgium as an enormous debt rather than having an enormous debt, suggesting something essential about the nature of the Belgian state (de Wever, 2008). In a 2011 interview with the *New Yorker*, the party leader expanded on these themes, describing Belgium as '*a labyrinth of institutions',* inexplicable to even those who were in charge, *'If you were to ask the average member of the federal parliament to explain how the system works, and who has authority to do what, he would run away in a panic*' (Baruma, 2011).

Exogenous events, particularly the economic crisis and the protracted period of government formation which took place simultaneously, reinforced this discourse and was employed by the party to justify its goals. In a 2011 interview with Christophe Deboursu, Bart de Wever said, '*If the ecologists wish to win elections, they must hope horrible things happen in the environment. Like Fukushima. There, they will profit by saying, 'Good, see, our programme is the right one*'. The 2009 manifesto portrays a '*quagmire at the federal level in the face of the economic crisis*' (N-VA, 2009). Framing Belgium as an inefficient state, one unable to cope with the demands of the contemporary world, supported the party's calls for self-government.

In his letter to party members explaining his motivations for joining the party and standing for office, former journalist Siegfried Bracke attributed his actions to the poor functioning of the Belgian government in the face of the crisis, describing Belgium as '*stalled*' and calling for things to be to set to right (Bracke, 2010b). De Wever's controversial interview with the German Spiegel returned to this theme, with dramatic language: '*Belgium, after endless political quarrels, is the sick man of Europe*', unable to cope with the challenges facilitating it (Spiegel, 2010). This was a result of the Belgian stalemate and particularly,

the continued dominance of the Parti Socialiste. '*Belgium isn't working anymore. Belgium is a failed nation*' (Spiegel, 2010). This failed nation should therefore, in the vision of the party, be replaced by a clear and transparent confederal system rather than further tinkering around the edges.

In sum, Belgium was considered irredeemable, even with further reforms. In a 2011 column in *De Standaard*, de Wever critiqued opponents of Flemish nationalism and those who sought to restore Belgian identity. '*If opponents of Flemish nationalism speak about Belgium, they should perhaps consider a wisdom of Edmund Burke: To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely*' (de Wever, 2011b).

5.3.2 The futility of further reforms

Throughout its lifespan, the N-VA was deeply critical of further rounds of reform within the confines of the federal model, arguing more fundamental change was required. This framing of state reform was rooted in the nature of the Belgian state and the inevitable processes set in motion. This was not unique to the N-VA, with other Flemish parties stressing the continuous nature of reform. CD&V leader Jean Luc Dehaene noted that '*Each phase of the State reform is fraught with the following one, the next reform exists in the present reform in an embryonic form*' (quoted by Martínez de Rituerto in El País, 1 August 2008). However, for the N-VA, the status quo, or this continual process of incremental reform was insufficient and would merely delay the inevitable, at a high cost.

As discussed in the previous section, the N-VA viewed Belgian state was inefficient and irrelevant, with little redeeming value. Therefore, further reforms within the federal structure of the Belgian state would be futile, as the problems of the Belgian state were so deeply entrenched. This cemented the party's position that it was the only actor advancing far-reaching reforms, or a Copernican revolution, a reversal of the relationship between Wallonia and Flanders and the central state, which would end this endless cycle of reform.

1. The futility of further reforms

Further incremental reforms within the federal structure were framed as futile, given the dysfunctions and the failings of the Belgian state, which could not take into account the needs of Flemings. These proposed reforms had already been overtaken by events (N-VA, 2010: 5).

Previous rounds of reform were understood to have taken place at the expense of Flemings, with Flemings exchanging bags of money for incremental powers, a result of the system in which Flemish parties sought further powers, and Walloons demanded the maintenance and increase of transfers in return. Further reforms would only encourage the proliferation of rules, bureaucracy, and complications which made the efficient working of government more difficult.

Bart de Wever described the results of the Octopus Group, a group of eight prominent Flemish politicians, in January 2008 in response to prolonged negotiations as

> *'a text developed by people who couldn't agree on anything and who were convinced that they could talk about everything'. It makes me think of what Napoleon said of the Bible, 'there are lots of promises, lots of good intentions, but nothing concrete"*
>
> Buxant, 2008.

Accordingly, he justified his party's decision not to participate on pragmatic grounds, saying '*What party president can be asked to enter a government when he is almost certain that he will not realise anything about his program?*' (Buxant, 2008).

Proposals to introduce a single federal constituency in which politicians would campaign in Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels, detailed by Deschouwer and Van Parijs (2009) and presented as a possible means of renewing Belgian democracy, were also rejected. This was considered ineffectual, and incompatible with the realities of the Belgian state and the existence of two separate demos. Speaking in response to proposals put forth by the Pavia Group, de Wever confirmed:

> *'I am not at all afraid of the establishment of a federal constituency. It will only confirm the historical process: the francophone parties will receive almost no votes in Flanders, and vice versa. The pursuit of more Belgium will paradoxically demonstrate that the country no longer exists'*
>
> Knack, 2007.

He continued on this theme in a 2008 interview, saying

> *'It makes no sense, a single constituency in Belgium because it does not correspond with society. The media is divided, the culture is divided, and public opinion. You cannot construct a constituency for two distinct communities. This country no longer exists'*

Buxant, 2008.

The N-VA's 2010 manifesto deals the issue directly, arguing '*It is the summation of Flemish and French speaking democracy that keeps this country in a permanent stranglehold of diplomacy, not the secession of different elections*' (N-VA, 2010: 69). This argument against a federal constituency was rooted in the absence of a common community and the futility of attempts to create one, due to the artificial nature of the Belgian state.

The sixth state reform, the *Butterfly Agreement*, named after the bow tie worn by Elio Di Rupo, was agreed following the prolonged federal government formation process in 2010 and 2011. It was negotiated by the governing coalition that excluded the N-VA. The reform reduced the powers of the Belgian Senate, transforming it into an assembly of regional parliaments, arranged for the split of Brussels-Halle-Vilvorde, transferred some competences to the regions, and reformed the financing of the regions and communities, fulfilling some of the 1999 demands made by the Flemish Parliament (Reuchamps, 2013; Deschouwer & Reuchamps, 2013).

While it was an important reform, Deschouwer and Reuchamps (2013) note it does not '*fundamentally change the nature of the Belgian federation*' and as a result, would fall short of the radical state reform that the N-VA envisaged and argued was necessary. In a 2012 speech at the University of Heidelberg, Bart de Wever described the Belgian system as a constant compromise which leaves everyone dissatisfied, '*The result of that clash of vision is a policy nobody wants and which doesn't go far enough*' (De Wever, 2012). Further incremental reforms, according to the N-VA, would do little to remedy this situation. Jan Jambon, then party leader within the House of Representatives critiqued the proposals as '*mediocrity, tinkering at the margins, half measures*' (Jambon, 2012). Siegfried Bracke described it as insufficient, lacking the necessary economic competences to increase economic output, saying '*A Copernican revolution? We think not'* (Bracke, 2013).

State reforms, both proposed and realised, were considered to be futile, serving to compound existing problems, owing to essential flaws in the Belgian state structure. The traditional processes by which state reform took place in Belgium were critiqued by the N-VA as costly and ineffectual, standing in the way of the more fundamental changes that were necessary. Only the N-VA could achieve these reforms, first through a confederal

arrangement, which was presented as an evolutionary step which would set the stage for further reforms.

5.3.3 Ties after self-government: a hollowed Belgium

While the SNP framed independence as an opportunity to facilitate an equal partnership between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom and the Volksunie spoke of opportunities to live as '*good neighbours*', the N-VA adopted a different approach when discussing its confederal model. In the near-term and under a confederalist arrangement, the Belgian state would be hollowed, serving as a '*letterbox*' for Flanders and Wallonia, through which the two confederal states would engage with the European Union. In the long-term, Belgium was ephemeral, and would gradually fade away.

1. Belgium as a glove

From 2003 onwards, the N-VA proposed a confederal model for Belgium, at least in the near to medium-term. The confederal model required the maintenance of the Belgian state – as an international actor, as a monarchical union, and as the glove, or alternatively, a letterbox for Flanders and Wallonia at the EU level (N-VA, 2007: 53). While the Volksunie once proposed living in separate apartments under one Belgian roof, the N-VA reduced the Belgian house to a messaging service.

The purpose of this was functional, not facilitating a strengthening of ties but allowing Flanders and Wallonia to engage at the European level. This would provide time for the European Union to develop and ultimately supplant the functions of the Belgian state. To employ the metaphor of the party and many Belgian political commentators, confederalism was not an attempt to revitalise a troubled marriage but to facilitate an amicable separation. This emphasis on what De Winter (2012) would call '*living together apart*' can be understood with regard to three key elements: the party's persistent framing of the Belgian state as ineffectual and without value, the objective of gradual change, and perceptions of Flemings and Walloons as lacking shared interests which would facilitate a renewed partnership. The party's framing and proposals are justified with reference to the negative characteristics of the Belgian state, beyond hope of redemption.

2. The gradual disappearance of Belgium

At the same time, the party did not propose Flemish independence in the near term, emphasising the lack of democratic support for such a move. De Wever consistently highlighted his party's conservative leanings, proposing evolution rather than revolution (de Wever, 2008). Siegfried Bracke's speech at the 2010 congress, suggested a peaceful, gradual process which would result in an independent Flanders in a highly integrated Europe. It was a '*story written in the stars*', but a gradual process, '*[t]hat will happen without a fight, without noise or compromises, it will be very nearly nature itself, or political Darwinism'* (Bracke, 2010a). Confederalism was botha necessary and radical step, and part of a more gradual process. When questioned on the life expectancy of the Belgian state, de Wever responded '*Impossible to say. It's a long-term evolution*', referring to it as a historical process which, having been set in motion, would continue (Buxant, 2012).

In a contribution to Carl Devos' book *Quo Vadis Belgica*, Bart de Wever explained this as a result of an emerging consensus in Flanders on further reforms. Situating this in a historical perspective, he argued

> *'Whoever demanded federalism is today separatist. Who later joined the debate over federalism is today a confederalist. Who used to be unitary, is today federalist. Every step to more Flanders seems to automatically open the door to new steps'*
>
> De Wever, 2006: 207.

In a 2010 blog post entitled *Independence or Confederalism*, Theo Francken, then a member of the Chamber of Representatives, discussed the party's gradualist approach, reaffirming its long-term commitment to independence but noting that, '*to achieve that goal, some reform steps must be taken'* (Francken, 2010). According to the N-VA's framing, Belgium would not be missed by anyone, a result of the artificiality of the Belgian state from its origins and the distance between Francophones and Walloons (De Wever, 2011a).

The gradual evolution proposed by the N-VA was to allow for the separation of Flanders and Wallonia rather than a renewal of partnership on a more equitable footing, pactist in function but not in principle. It sought to maintain some of the trappings of the Belgian state, but for pragmatic reasons, rather than motivated by some intrinsic value or a desire to preserve historical or social unions. There was no real discussion of an opportunity to reset relationships or renew ties between Flanders and Wallonia beyond the functional necessities of joint management of Brussels, the necessary criteria of European Union

membership and the temporary maintenance of the solidarity mechanism (de Wever, 2011a).

This negative framing of the state and the prospect of further state reform was employed as justification for Flemish self-government. The goals of the Flemish people, according to the N-VA, would not be pursued within the existing structure of the Belgian state – a more radical reform, whether confederalism or independence within the European Union was required. The party's position on self-government, both the content of the goal and the means by which it would be pursued, has been characterised by ambiguity, perhaps resulting from the idea that Belgium would inevitably, and gradually, fade away. Although its position can be characterised as pactist, preserving several core functions, it was a pragmatic position, rooted in the needs to mitigate the costs of self-government rather than allow for a renewal of relationships.

5.4 Comparing the framing of the state and self-government

Despite significant differences in the structures of the Belgian and British states, as well as the context in which the three parties have competed, similarities in the framing of the state and the prospect of state reform can be identified. Change over time, within each party, in response to shifts in the composition or behaviour of the state, is also evident. The framing of the state is consistent between the three parties, reflecting the political and economic dynamics in their respective systems. The Belgian and British unions were framed, not as undemocratic oppressors who must be overthrown, but as an anachronism of history, past their expiry date, and failing, by virtue of their structure and power dynamics, to serve the interests of the nations in question. At times, they were also framed

Framing Self-Government and the State

	Dimensions	*SNP*	*VU*	*N-VA*
1.	**The state and existing state structures**	*Hostile* *Neglectful*	*Hostile* *Of diminishing value*	*Artificial* *Inefficient and irrelevant*
2.	**Proposed and realised state reform**	*A dangerous distraction* *A first step toward self-government* *Insufficient but workable*	*Insufficient* *An incremental process* *Inevitable*	*The futility of further reforms*
3.	**Visions of self-government and relations with the state**	*A partnership of equals*	*Good neighbours*	*A letterbox for Flanders and Wallonia* *Gradually disappearing*

as directly hostile towards the nations. Changes in the framing can be identified in each case.

Both the SNP and the Volksunie, at their origins, spoke of the hostility of the central state towards their respective regions, with this hostility taking cultural and economic forms. This language shifted in light of political and economic developments, particularly the granting of a limited degree of self-government, which made these arguments less tenable. The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie was more negative than its predecessor towards the state but its arguments focused on the artificial nature of Belgium and its inefficiencies rather than accusing it of repression. The language of exploitation is, however, present in discussions of the economic relations between Flanders and Wallonia. The framing of the Volksunie and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie was heavily influenced by demographic and economic realities, with Flanders the dominant partner in the Belgian union.

In each case, proposals for state reform or devolution were made by the centre and by political rivals. This presents a challenge to sub-state nationalist parties - are they a distraction from the ultimate aims or a meaningful step forward? The SNP faced divisions on this topic, with internal debates occurring over whether the party should engage with these proposals or hold out for its ultimate goal and this shaped the party's behaviour. By the 1980s, however, we can identify a distinct stepping stone approach, in which devolution proposals were critiqued as insufficient, but ultimately considered to be a

positive first step towards self-government. It embraced devolution in 1999, embracing it not enthusiastically, but with the understanding that it could be a viable platform for which self-government could be pursued, and Scotland's interests advanced.

The Volksunie, from its origins, was more amenable to the further transfer of powers, critiquing proposals which fell short of federalisation in the 1960s and 1970s but ultimately pledging to support any step which would not hinder further self-government. It was aided, in some ways, by the exit of more radical elements in response to the failure of the Egmont Pact. The incremental nature of Belgian state reform, which suggested the seeds for subsequent rounds of reform were always embedded in the current round also supported this gradualist position. Federalisation, according to the VU, was a matter of when and not if, and the VU could afford to be patient. The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, particularly in its early years, was more radical, dismissing further reforms which would not see a fundamental reversal in the relationships between the centre and Flanders and Wallonia, as insufficient. It sought to challenge the tendencies of the Belgian state and governing coalitions, which were constantly tinkering at the margins rather than undertaking genuine reform. These reforms were, in the eyes of the party, another example of the dysfunctions of the Belgian state. It was also viewed through the lens of the party system, a means of underlining the difference between the N-VA as an outsider and parties which had been co-opted in the Belgian state system, discussed in greater detail in the chapter which follows. All three parties demonstrated pragmatism, being critical of proposed reforms, but ultimately embracing them as a stepping stone toward further self-government.

Returning to Lluch's conception of pactists versus principled independentist standpoints, we can assess the proposals and framing of self-government and relations with the embedding state. The content of the self-government goals as proposed by all three parties suggest pactists positions, with some degree of cooperation and coordination maintained. However, the framing of this differs. Interestingly, all three employ domestic metaphors, with the SNP focusing on equal partnerships, social ties, but also the opportunity to recast these relationships in a more positive light, turning '*surly tenants into good neighbours*' (Salmond, 1999). The Volksunie's initial proposals involved Flemings and Walloons living separately under one roof. This later shifted, with a narrative of good neighbours within the European Union taking its place. The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie

engaged less with this concept, reducing the Belgian state to a letterbox, and a transitory one at that, a proposal which foresaw what De Winter (2012) described as '*living together apart*', dividing competences to reduce conflict rather than to revitalise relationships.

In conclusion, for all three parties, the state is central to their self-government goals – whether as a factor which motivates self-government or accommodates it. The state is utilised as a justification for self-government, underlining its failure to accommodate the goals of the nation, but also retains some resonance in the event of self-government, providing, to varying degrees, a supporting structure through which self-government can be pursued. This suggests self-government, even in its most radical forms, continues to be closely linked with the embedding state. This is also encapsulated in each party's discussion of the party system, which draws a distinction between parties and processes which represent the nation and those which represent the larger state.

Chapter Six: Framing self-government and the party system

Sub-state nationalist objectives can be pursued through larger social movements or political parties. In both Scotland and Flanders, sub-state nationalism has primarily manifested in the form of political parties, and as a result, the pursuit of self-government goals is situated mainly within this domain. The SNP, VU, and N-VA have pursued their self-government goals through electoral means, although there is variation in the ways which these electoral gains are employed to further the cause. The pursuit of self-government goals, as a result, reflects the dynamic interaction between the party itself, the system in which it competes, and the position and behaviour of political rivals. Two aspects of the party system are analysed here: the party as an agent of self-government, positioning itself vis-à-vis its political rivals and the party as an actor which can pursue self-government directly.

Sub-state nationalist parties are expected to position themselves as the defender of the nation, challenge the credibility of rivals who attempt to speak for the nation and respond to the opening or closing of political opportunity structures within the party system. They are considered strategic actors, responding to events and behaving differently in response to events and across levels. They face challenges when traditional or statewide parties begin to co-opt their positions (Rudolph & Thompson, 1985).

Party systems are '*not immutable*', and can shift in response to external forces as well as changes in the form of the state (Rokkan & Urwin, 1982: 167). Sub-state nationalist parties are expected to account for these changing dynamics. In this chapter, I examine sub-state nationalist responses to changes within the party system, including changes in the organisation of political rivals, but also in response to state reform which requires a reorientation of parties in a political space. I examine this with reference to a party's understanding of its systemic relevance within the party system, drawing inspiration from Sartori's concepts of blackmail and coalition relevance. Rather than assessing their actual relevance within the party system, I examine each party's self-understanding and framing of its relevance.

In all three cases, evidence of party system change is present. For the SNP, party system change took place late in the party's lifespan in response to devolution, which saw the

reorientation of statewide parties to better compete in a multi-level space. For the Volksunie, party system change took place much earlier, with the regionalisation of the Belgian party system occuring the 1960s and 1970s and preceding significant changes in the structure of the state. The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie faced a static but very crowded political space, defined by a degree of consensus on the desirability of further self-government.

In this chapter, I examine two key dimensions in my analysis of the way self-government is framed with reference to the party system. Firstly, I address how sub-state nationalist political position themselves as credible agents of self-government and question the ability of their political rivals to adequately do so. Secondly, I address the means available to the party and its framing of its blackmail or coalition relevance, particularly in light of changes in the party system and the introduction of multilevel government. This speaks to the means that a party has at is disposal and explores the way means may influence the goals themselves. What this chapter does not do is analyse the counter-framing, or charges levied by political rivals or internal party system dynamics. I will begin with the SNP, before turning to the Volksunie and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie and conclude with comparison of the three parties.

6.1 The Scottish National Party in a shifting party system

The Scottish National Party emerged in a party system dominated by two main parties and struggled to achieve any systemic relevance until the 1960s. It failed to secure consistent representation within the House of Commons until the 1970s. Although it succeeded in by-elections in 1945 and 1967, it lost these seats in the subsequent general election. The SNP was considered in its early days as '*a modest family business'* with the '*simplicity of eighteenth-century Scottish religious dissent: a single political tenet which was one thing needful*' (Harvie, 1998: 173). Until 1967, Gordon Wilson (2009) described it as '*a very successful protest movement*' which menaced the statewide parties but had not yet experienced a significant victory. The success of Winnie Ewing increased the SNP's systemic relevance, putting Labour on notice and establishing the SNP '*as a potential threat to practically every seat in Scotland, no matter how safe*' (Kellas, 1968: 203). This triggered the development of proposals by both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party for a limited form of Scottish self-government, an effort to accommodate the SNP and counter

the electoral threat posed by the party (Mitchell, 1996: 46). The party's responses to proposed and realised state reform was discussed in the preceding chapter.

The party's relevance grew as it gained votes and seats in the 1970s. This increased its blackmail potential, placing the issue of devolution on the political agenda and challenging traditional parties for votes (Brand et al, 1994: 616). It also had ownership over the independence issue, with 87.9% of the electorate knowing about its independence ambitions (Newman, 1992: 13). The party had limited coalition potential in the Westminster system as a result of its commitment to independence but did agree to support the Labour minority government, formed following the October 1974 elections as long as the party maintained its commitment to securing devolution. It did, however, often vote against the government (Fusaro, 1979).

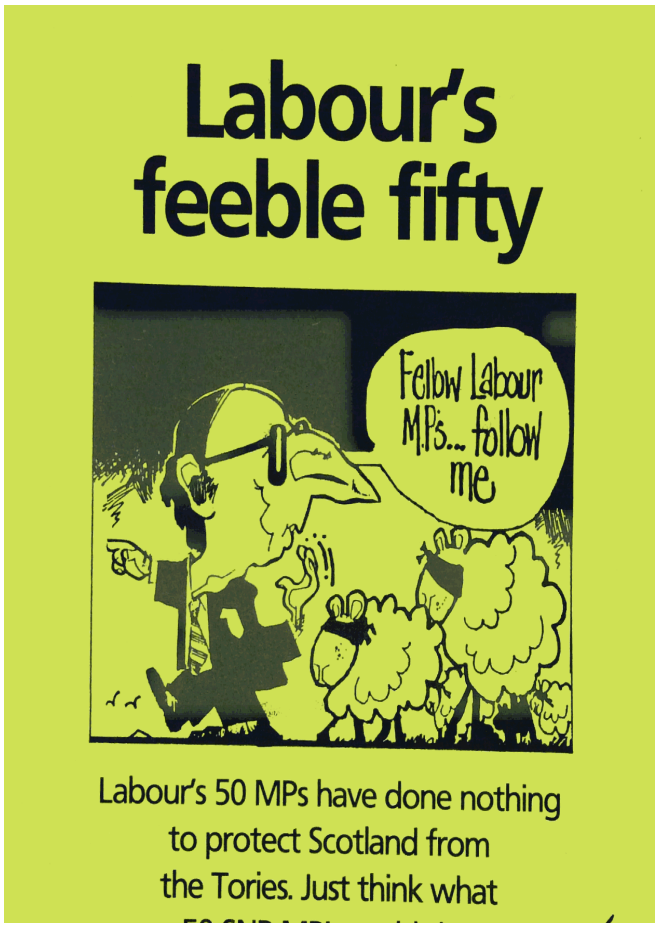


Image: The SNP's poster suggested that Labour was unable to stand up against Thatcher's Conservative Government and represent Scottish interests

The 1979 referendum on devolution was ultimately unsuccessful and the issue was removed from the political agenda and the SNP returned to political obscurity for some time (Lynch, 2009: 620). Reflecting on the SNP's performance in the 1970s, Alex Salmond characterised it as '*boom and bust*' nationalism, in which '*support would rise like a rocket, only to fall back like the stick*', limiting the party's blackmail potential (Salmond, 1999). The SNP's relevance was exercised, with the party moving against the Labour Government in a vote of no confidence, and subsequently diminished, with the loss of nine seats in the subsequent election (Newman, 1996: 38; Ishiyama & Breuning, 1998: 142).

The party was weakened in the 1980s but remained relevant, challenging Labour on its ability to represent Scotland's interest at Westminster, and threatening the party's predominance in the Labour heartlands. A political poster (see inset) described Labour's MPs as the '*feeble fifty*', unable to protect Scotland from the punitive policies of Margaret Thatcher. In his maiden speech in the House of Commons, Alex Salmond described Labour's broken promises, saying '*We are now four years on and the dogs of war not only have not bitten very hard but have lost their bark*' (HC Deb 29 June 1987 vol 118 c280). The Labour Party's role in the Scottish Constitutional Convention served to challenge the SNP's ownership of self-government.. The Govan by-election, in which Labour lost to Jim Sillars reinforced its commitment to some form of self-government and led to its leadership role in the convention. (Macwhirter, 1990: 26).

Although Labour was able to take credit for devolution, the introduction of the Scottish Parliament provided new opportunity structures for the SNP, allowing them to standas a party of government (Lynch, 2009: 632). Its entry into government in 2007 and return in 2011 cemented its position within the Scottish political system but required it to draw a distinction between the business of government and the business of independence. Following the victory of the party in 2011, the business of government and the business of independence became intertwined.

In this section, I will analyse the party's framing of itself and its role within its system. Firstly, I examine the framing of the SNP and its pursuit of self-government, identifying two key frames (1) the frame of Scotland's party, Scotland's voice, used to stress that only the SNP could pursue self-government and (2) the frame of the illegitimacy of political rivals, both in their ability to defend Scottish interests and advance the cause of self-government, even in a more limited form. Secondly, I look to the framing of the means and the role and relevance of the party, from its own view, which includes a temporal component, shifting with devolution in 1997. In this section, three key frames are identified and discussed: (1) a party of action, pursuing self-government directly should it receive the required number of seats at Westminster; (2) a party of blackmail, placing pressure on mainstream parties to take an interest in Scottish concerns; and finally, (3) a party of government, a frame which emerged with devolution. The party's framing shifted with devolution, reflecting the multi-level space in which it competed, stressing blackmail at Westminster and government at Holyrood.

6.1.2 The SNP and its rivals: exclusivity and illegitimacy

The SNP benefited from a claim to exclusivity. With limited exceptions, it stood alone as vote-seeking party calling for self-government until the 1960s, when its electoral success provoked a response from statewide rivals. It was also, until recently, when it was joined by the Greens, the only party calling for political independence. In the absence of credible claims to the contrary, it was able to position itself as speaking for Scotland, while Scotland's interests were ignored and neglected by statewide parties. '*The idea that a party might somehow embody an entire national movement acquired a legitimacy in the absence of any serious alternative home rule organisation*' (Mitchell, 1996: 99). This provided it with an opportunity to frame itself and its rivals vis-à-vis self-government in two distinctive ways. Firstly, it positioned itself as Scotland's party and Scotland's voice. Secondly, it challenged the legitimacy of statewide parties on their ability to speak for Scotland, framing their attempts to do so asdisingenuous. Together, these frames were employed to bolster the argument that only the SNP could pursue and deliver self-government. They were, however, contested, particularly from the 1980s onwards, when the Labour Party took a leadership role in the Constitutional Convention, and ultimately delivered devolution in 1997. The reorientation of the political system towards Holyrood also made these claims less credible.

1. Scotland's party, Scotland's voice

The SNP presented itself throughout its lifespan as the party which could speak credibly, both on behalf of Scottish self-government and in favour of the broader Scottish interests, employing the frame of Scotland's party, Scotland's voice. This framing, present pre-1999, became more challenging in the devolutionary period, as political rivals reorganised in response to devolution. However, the party continued to employ this label of Scotland's Party, particularly at Westminster.

The party's documents made an explicit claim to speak on behalf of the nation, presenting itself as unified and singularly focused on Scottish interests, something it argued could not be claimed by its competitors (SNP, 1960). Support for the SNP and the Scottish nation were closely linked in party discourse, as '*Scotland does well when the SNP does well*', emphasising the blackmail relevance of the party, or its ability to extract concessions from the UK government. It was the '*the only force in politics which can conceivably achieve any degree of self-government for Scotland*' (I. MacCormick, 1970: 91). Lacking the ability, or will, to pursue

self-government directly, the party positioned itself as a defender of Scottish interests and a threat to statewide parties, a point which was continually reiterated in core texts. It focused on its unique ability to '*Put Scotland First*', which was '*a slogan which no other politicians can use because the National party is the only Scottish political party*' (SNP, 1968). Voters were urged in 1983 to '*choose Scotland by voting for the Scottish National Party, the only party to put Scotland's interests first'* (SNP, 1983) and in 1987 to '*play the Scottish card*' (SNP, 1987).

This emphasis on the Scottish identity of the party was contrasted with those of political rivals, who were at various points described as '*English*', '*London*' or '*Westminster*' parties, all terms employed to emphasise their distance from Scotland and Scottish interests. Parties were characterised as '*pseudo-Scottish and London political parties under the domination of English thought*' (SNP, 1952). Iain McCormick summed up the traditional political system as cutting across the interests of Scotland with '*the political squabbling between right and left*' as the '*chief raison d' être of the English-based parties*' (I. MacCormick, 1970: 91). This frame was also employed to challenge the credibility of rivals proposing devolution, with their credentials and motivations considered suspect.

This frame continued to be employed in with devolution, with little modification. However, these claims of exclusivity became more difficult as rival parties reorganised themselves for competition at Holyrood and increasingly challenging the SNP's ownership of the self-government issue, albeit while maintaining opposition to independence. In his review of the first ten years of the Scottish Parliament, Jeffery (2009: 155) notes statewide parties are increasingly drawn towards '*the SNP's turf*' in their articulation of their political programmes. Ichijo (2012: 24) describes the post-devolution Scottish political space as a '*nationalist or nationalised discursive framework*' in which all parties showcased their Scottish credentials.

Its independence and outsider position was portrayed as an advantage rather than a hindrance. '*Scotland's Parliament needs Scotland's Party. A Party in tune with Scottish needs and hopes, and always with Scottish priorities at the forefront of our thinking. A party that does not dance to Westminster's tune*' (SNP, 1999). It was the only party which could advance the cause of Scottish independence, although it attempted to situate itself in a broader movement. *'Independence won't be won by one Party alone but delivered by many with the support of the people. The SNP, though, remains fundamental to achieving that goal*' (MacAskill, 2004: 16).

At Westminster, the SNP positioned itself as '*Scotland's Party*', again contrasted with '*London parties*' which were at a remove from Scotland and focused their attention on English constituents (SNP, 2005; 2010). *'The SNP has no split loyalty; we work first, last and always for the Scottish interest*' (SNP, 2001). They were, as a result, unable to act in Scotland's interests due to their organisational arrangements (SNP, 2010).

> *'Labour and Tory MPs have voted against the Scottish interest time and again, while the Liberal Democrats run down Labour at Westminster but prop them up in Scotland. Only the SNP can be trusted ALWAYS to stand up for Scotland'*
>
> SNP, 2005.

This framing was closely linked with its framing of its rivals, whose credibility and legitimacy – in speaking for Scotland and in delivering some degree of self-government – was consistently challenged.

2. The illegitimacy of political rivals

Statewide parties were portrayed as lacking the legitimacy to speak on behalf of Scotland and pursue even a limited degree of self-government. This illegitimacy was a persistent frame and was bolstered by several arguments: the divided loyalties of statewide parties, the lack of confidence that unionist parties, and their Scottish members, had in Scotland's ability to govern itself, and an insufficient or disingenuous commitment to Scottish self-government.

Statewide parties were accused of having divided loyalties, by virtue of their reliance on English voters and therefore, focus on English interests. TH Gibson (1951) described the SNP's opposition to both of the dominant statewide parties, arguing '*We are in effect more opposed to each of the political parties than the Tory Party is to the Labour Party and vice versa, for we oppose the whole set-up of their parties and their method of operating*'. At times, these parties were described as *'English parties*', representing English interests at Scotland's expense. They were unable to solve the problems of Scotland, beholden to Anglo-Scottish class interests and the needs of England (SNP, 1968). They were later labelled as London or Westminster parties, which supported the party's argument they were at a remove from Scotland but also avoided critiques of ethnic nationalism (SNP, 1974). In *Scotland Lives*, Billy Wolfe's 1973 publication, he described the complicity of statewide parties and '*these minions of the English parties*'.

> *'Surely the people of Scotland want to be free for ever from the control of those who, for generations, have appeared to be Scottish, have spoken (some of them) with Scottish accents but who have been content merely with representing their constituencies in London, instead of acting for Scotland in relation to Scottish needs and aspirations'.*
>
> Wolfe, 1973: 41.

From the 1980s onwards, Conservatives were labelled as an English party, at their core, hostile to Scotland (SNP, 1987). Labour rivals were considered powerless to defend Scotland. This narrative was challenged in the 1980s when the leadership of Labour in the Scottish Constitutional Convention, an attempt to '*recapture the mantle of Scotland's national party*' (Mitchell, 1996: 129). On the eve of the opening of the Scottish Parliament, Alex Salmond contested the notion that a Scottish Labour government could adequately represent Scotland, as '*ultimately decisions will be made not in Scotland, but in Millbank or Downing St. That means that decisions will be made not because they are right for Scotland, but because they are acceptable to Tony Blair*' (Salmond, 1999).

The organisational arrangements were not the only source of critique for the SNP. It also accused statewide parties and in particular, Scottish politicians within these parties, of a lack of confidencein Scotland. This was persistently employed both before 1999 and after but was employed in different ways. Pre-devolution, it was used to undermine critiques of self-government while later, it was used to counter criticism of devolution.

Robert McIntyre, in a 1960 speech entitled *Speaking for Scotland* called into question the ability of statewide parties to adequately represent Scotland, saying '*After all, they cannot speak for Scotland. They do not believe in their country; so how can they represent it?*' (McIntyre, 1960). Jim Sillars (1991) spoke of Scotland as subject to '*a deliberate policy of undermining its self-assurance and respectability*', and to a lie told by Unionist parties that Scotland was too poor to go it alone. In a 1995 speech, Salmond described this as intentional, '*it has been the Labour Party's strategy for half a century to sap the self-confidence of Scotland, and deliver it bound and tied into the voting lobbies of Westminster*' (Salmond, 1995). In 1999, Salmond described a process of diminishing Scotland, '*For much of the last 300 years Scotland has been told that it is too small, too distant, too poor, or too stupid to govern itself*' (Salmond, 1999). He returned to this theme in his 2005 conference speech '*Unionism depends on the notion that somehow our nation of Scotland is incapable of making the big decisions…The truth is that Scotland is good enough, big enough, and*

talented enough to be independent' (Salmond, 2005). This was also employed throughout the referendum campaign.

Returning to the SNP's core purpose, the commitment of political rivals to self-government was persistently called into question, considered to be motivated by electoral calculations rather than a genuine commitment to self-government. This was especially salient when statewide parties attempted, as Brand (1993: 42) described it, to '*steal the Nationalists' clothes*' in the 1970s by proposing a more limited form of self-government. In a debate on devolution, Iain MacCormick described proposals as an attempt at '*weathering a temporary nationalist storm by holding out the hope that they are genuinely interested in legislative devolution*' (I. MacCormick, 1970: 100-101). These were described as '*cynical electoral calculation*s' rather than '*settled convictions was to what constitutes Scotland's best interests*' (SNP, 1974). The past behaviour of its rivals informed the party's contemporary approach to further devolution, with Alex Salmond asking, in 2005, '*If Tory and Labour politicians were prepared to lie and cheat Scotland in the 1970s why should anyone believe a word they have to say about Scotland in 2005 or in 2007?*' (Salmond, 2005).

These two frames were closely interconnected – the party positioned itself as the only party which could credibly speak for Scotland while challenging the legitimacy of its political rivals to do so. Together these suggested Scotland's interests were not achievable within the existing system, self-government was required.

6.1.3 The pursuit of self-government: action, blackmail, and government

The party system in which the SNP stood can be understood with reference to three key phases. The first was one in which Labour and Conservatives dominated, and little room existed for smaller rivals, including the SNP, and persisted between the party's origins through the 1970s. The second phase was one of increasing challenge to two-party dominance in Scotland, with the electoral breakthrough and rise of the SNP (and subsequent decline), an increase in support for the Labour party and a dramatic decline in Conservative support (Webb, 2000: 16; Jaensch, 1976). The system shifted yet again, and more dramatically, in 1999, with devolution (Hopkin, 2003; 2009). Devolution presented an opportunity, providing the prospect of government for the first time, but

also a challenge, as unionist parties reoriented themselves towards this space and challenged the SNP's claims to exclusivity.

Three key frames come to the fore here, and they each have a temporal dimension. Firstly, the party framed itself as a party of action, detailing how the party was to pursue self-government. Pre-devolution, this was through participation in Westminster elections and the achievement of the majority of seats, which would provide a mandate to open negotiations for independence. Post-devolution, this shifted, with action taking place from within government with legislation for a referendum. Secondly, the party framed itself as a party of blackmail, attempting to exert pressure on statewide rivals. This frame was present both pre and post-1999, and could be employed in pursuit of the party's twin aims – Scottish independence and the furtherance of Scottish interests. The final frame came with devolution, portraying the party as one of government, both prospective and realised. These frames address the party's understanding of its own means and relevance within the political party system.

1. A party of action

From its origins, the SNP sought to pursue self-government directly, not through a plebiscite or political protest but through action at Westminster, a position maintained until devolution. A majority of Scottish seats secured by the SNP would be translated into a mandate to open negotiations for independence. This agreement would then be subject to a vote by the Scottish people (SNP, 1967). Unlike Sinn Fein, which competed in Westminster elections but declined to occupy seats won, the SNP was committed to full and constructive participation at Westminster. It rejected, in its early years, a referendum, saying:

> *'Plebiscites of any description, while they may be useful in ascertaining the views of the public, have in themselves no force or effect until it is enacted that they should have. They may be dangerous, if by trying to induce people to believe that they do have such force, they divert attention away from the proper method of enforcing the wishes of the people'*
>
> TH Gibson, 1951.

The SNP and You, first published in 1967, clarified the party's position, saying '*Until SNP M.P.s hold a majority of Scottish seats, they will take part in the UK Parliament, voting and working in the interests of the people in Scotland, in support of legislation which is in accord with the SNP policy*'. These goals were to be pursued through parliamentary means. Faced with critiques at

Westminster, Iain MacCormick countered criticisms, saying '*We have already proved, time and time again, that we are not prepared to use any other means of furthering our aims than the purely constitutional mans of the ballot box. Our very presence here proves that*' (HC Deb 14 January 1976 vol 903 c526).

With the prospect of devolution in the 1970s, the SNP reinforced its commitment to pursuing self-government within this forum. While it pledged to work within the Scottish Assembly, it was at Westminster through which independence would be achieved. Iain MacCormick stressed this commitment, '*First, we will go to the Scottish Assembly and fight democratically – as we have always fought – to win seats. We shall help make that Assembly work and work well*' (HC Deb 14 January 1976 vol 903 c526). At the same time, the party's commitment to contest seats at Westminster would remain unchanged (HC Deb 14 December 1976 vol 922 c1354-5).

Although this was an unlikely strategy, described by MacAskill as the '*big bang*' theory of nationalism (2004: 37-38), it was one which allowed it to pursue self-government but also attempt to fulfil its second aim, the '*furtherance of all Scottish interests*' by attempting to stand up for Scotland in at the centre.

Devolution presented a new forum for pursuing self-government, and from this point onward it was through government, discussed in frame 3 below, that it would be achieved. In a devolved context, the SNP sought to form a government and pass legislation for a referendum on Scottish independence (SNP, 1999).

2. A party of blackmail

Although the SNP did not achieve systemic relevance until the 1960s and 1970s, it portrayed itself as a blackmail actor throughout its lifespan, seeking to further the cause of Scottish self-government and represent Scottish interests through pressure on statewide actors. Within this context, the SNP acted as both a party and a pressure group, given the nearly non-existent prospects of being included in government at the centre.

During his brief tenure at Westminster, party leader Robert McIntyre told fellow MPs

> *'I will never tire of pointing out to members of this House that if they do not want to hear more about Scotland, they have a solution in their own hands. I do not want to be here anymore than they want to listen to me here; I want to be elsewhere, in an Assembly directly responsible to the Scottish people'*

HC Deb 06 June 1945 vol 411 c1010

It justified its position as a blackmail actor by making reference to proposals made by statewide parties in the 1960s and 1970s. In the view of the SNP, Labour and Conservatives were frightened by the uptick in support for the Nationalists and would make concessions in order to counter this threat. In *Speaking for Scotland*, similarities were noted between proposals made by statewide parties and those of the SNP, characterising this as political plagiarism, as '*No one can speak even half honestly about Scotland and not sound like a Nationalist – or fail to borrow extensively from the National Party's policies and speakers*' (SNP, 1960). The success of this strategy was evidenced by a subsequent '*flood of concessions to Scotland from the London political parties*' (SNP, 1974).

The party's blackmail relevance was used to justify its support of the Labour minority government between 1974 and 1979,offering an opportunity to further a limited form of self-government. The strength and durability of these reforms was contingent on continued pressure by the SNP, '*Any economic concessions which Scotland may win from Westminster, and any steps towards self-government which maybe conceded will depend entirely on the size of the SNP vote and the number of SNP M.P.s elected*' (SNP, 1977). It stressed to voters the necessity of supporting the SNP, not as a party of government but a party which could exert pressure and ensure that promises were fulfilled.

Even amidst a period of electoral decline which followed the failed referendum on Scottish devolution and the collapse of the minority Labour government, a move aided by the support of the SNP for a no confidence motion, the SNP continued to stress its relevance as a blackmail actor. With the prospect of devolution unlikely under a Conservative government, the SNP continued to emphasise its blackmail role. The failed referendum and the party's defeat at the polls reinforced this tactic, and voters were urged to '*play the nationalist card*' by voting for the SNP and implicitly, against statewide parties (SNP, 1983). It reminded voters '*Nothing will happen unless the SNP is strong and determined and attracting the support of the people*' (SNP, 1987) and pledged in the event of a Doomsday scenario, to support Labour in exchange for genuine reform. Salmond cited attacks on the SNP as evidence of its influence, saying '*When the SNP is under attack that is a sure sign that it is rising and that the Government are frightened*' (HC Deb 06 July 1988 vol 136 c1114).

With devolution, the SNP continued to stress its blackmail influence at Westminster while positioning itself as a party of government at Holyrood. A vote for the SNP at Westminster elections was to support Scotland and the Scottish Parliament viewed as a '*vote to win more powers for the Scottish Parliament and a vote for MPs who will always put Scotland first*' (SNP, 2001). In his 2004 conference speech, Salmond spoke of the opportunity to '*make Westminster dance to a Scottish tune*' (Salmond, 2004). Although it focused its attentions on Holyrood, it justified its continued pursuit of seats at Westminster elections as representing a distinct need and opportunity. '*As long as we are still partly governed by Westminster we need strong SNP voices speaking up for Scotland*' (SNP, 2005).

The SNP failed to make gains at Westminster during this period, returning six seats in 2001, 2005, and 2010 and securing roughly one-fifth of the overall vote. Its manifestos were shorter, and its expenditures were lower for these contests than those which took place at Holyrood. However, SNP MPs retained a focus on their blackmail potential, necessary to extract further concessions from Westminster. In 2010, it also sought to play an enhanced role should the election result in a hung parliament, saying '*it is with a balanced parliament that Scotland's greatest opportunity exists*' (SNP, 2010). It also focused, in this election, on ideological issues, as it urged voters to elect a '*local champion*' to combat a policy of austerity at Westminster. Adopting the '*Nat*' label it typically rejected, the party argued '*more votes means more Nats, and more Nats mean less cuts*' (SNP, 2010). This positioned the SNP as a voice for Scotland but also as a progressive voice against austerity, in Scotland but also at the centre, a theme that became more pronounced from 2010 onwards.

In 1999, the SNP largely reoriented its attention to Holyrood, allocating many of its institutional and human resources towards campaigning and participation at this level. Westminster remained important as a venue in which Scotland's interests must be represented. Although beyond the scope of this study, the party's positioning of itself in the 2015 Westminster election saw both frames of blackmail, through its support of a predicted minority Labour government, and of the unique ability to stand up for Scotland, in contrast to its competitors.

3. A party of government

At the Scottish Parliamentary level, the SNP framed itself as a party of prospective government, given the opportunities available to it in this new space. Five of six MPs

elected to Westminster in 1997 stood down in 2001, a move designed to symbolise '*the transfer of day to day politics to Holyrood*' (Mitchell et al, 2012: 11). The new parliament was a platform through which the party could pursue government, and through government, independence. It pledged in the event of a majority government to hold a referendum on Scottish independence. Lynch describes the SNP's future as '*now inextricably bound up with this devolved parliament, in terms of the party's ability to use the institution as a platform for independence*' (Lynch, 2002: 3).

At Holyrood, the party oriented itself as a party of government, no longer able to maintain its traditional role, in the '*normal comfort of opposition*' (Mitchell 1996: 208). MacAskill (2004: 41) documented the challenges inherent in this process, saying '*the SNP must outline a coherent manifesto for a Devolved Administration as well as a clear vision for an Independent Nation*'. In its Holyrood manifesto, the SNP described itself as '*Scotland's Party for Scotland's Parliament*', stressing its pursuit of government rather than independence and its unique claim to represent Scotland exclusively (SNP, 1999). By promising that voters would have an opportunity to vote in a referendum on independence, the SNP behaved strategically *'separating party from policy'* (Leith & Steven, 2010: 293). Its ability to govern was understood to help support the case for independence, '*to make as much of a difference as we can with the current powers of the Scottish Parliament, and to show why we need the powers of Independence*' (SNP, 1999). It pledged to act constructively to maximise Scotland's powers within the existing constitutional settlement and make a case for independence (SNP, 2003). In response to growing disillusionment with devolution, a result of overrunning costs of the Scottish Parliament building, expense scandals, the SNP positioned itself as a voice for reform and progress. Speaking in 2005, Salmond argued '*Scotland needs independence, self-determination and self-respect*', adding '*And right now Scotland needs the SNP*' (Salmond, 2005)

Having formed a minority government in 2007, the party had to balance its pursuit of policy within the devolved institutions and self-government in the near to medium-term. Salmond's first speech as First Minister described its dual role, to '*work immediately within devolved government to deliver on core domestic policies*' and to explore '*the next stage in Scotland's constitutional journey*' (Salmond, 2007). Support for the SNP was separated from support for independence, and the First Minister argued the business of government '*That can be done while also exploring the next stage in Scotland's constitutional journey'* (Salmond, 2007). The

National Conversations process was introduced as an alternative, a consultative process designed to outline the choices available to Scotland.

The party's 2011 manifesto, *Re-elect a Scottish Government Working for Scotland,* prioritised a message of competence in government rather than independence. It drew a distinction between the party as one of government, proposing a range of policies, and the party which would advance independence. *'Independence will only happen when people in Scotland vote for it. That is why independence is your choice*' (SNP, 2011). The party's 2011 programme for government, presented by Alex Salmond, focused on jobs, economic growth, health, and social policy, coming to independence only at the very end. The party attributed its support to recognition by the voter of the party's '*proven competence and commitment*' but also to its positive position on Scotland's constitutional future (Salmond, 2011).

The framing of the pursuit of self-government – in the form of action, blackmail and government - captures the challenges and opportunities available to the party in a multi-level space as well as the need to balance electoral concerns with the pursuit of self-government. The introduction of devolution provided an opportunity, unavailable to statewide rivals, to stress both blackmail and governing potential – serving as a strident voice in defence of the nation at the centre, and a party of responsible government at the sub-state level.

6.2 The Volksunie: Self-government in a fragmented party system

The Volksunie was one of the most successful sub-state nationalist parties, notable for incentivising the process of state reform, its entry into government at the centre, and its impact on the highly pillarised Belgian party system. Originating in the 1950s, it made a rapid rise to systemic relevance, both as a blackmail actor and as a prospective coalition partner at the centre. It was, however, a victim of its own success, struggling to define itself in a party space increasingly focused on Flanders.

The Volksunie came into being in a highly pillarised Belgian party system, dominated by the three main political factions - Socialists, Liberals, and Christian Democrats (Delwit & Van Haute, 2001: 15). In the 1950 general election, these three parties received 94% of the vote. However, the environment in which it emerged was a fertile one, with the School

Pact deemphasising religious issues, and public concern over the linguistic census, the Belgian Congo, and the state of the economy (Deschouwer, 2009: 39).

The main change in the party system did not come with state reform, a protracted process which culminated in federalisation in 1993, but was a response to divergent interests within the main parties and the emergence of regionalist parties in Wallonia, Brussels, and Flanders in the 1960s and 1970s (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009: 285; De Winter et al, 2006: 934; Deschouwer, 2013: 338). The Belgian party system became, in the postwar period, increasingly complex, with the split of Christian Democrats, Liberal, and Socialist parties into Dutch and Francophone parties in 1968, 1972, and 1978 respectively, allowing them to mobilise and counter the regionalist threat (De Winter et al, 2006: 934). The Belgian party system is characterised by a high number of effective parties and high degrees of fragmentation (De Winter at al., 2006). This fragmentation provided opportunities for the Volksunie to participate directly in government but also created obstacles because of intense competition between parties. After the split of the traditional parties, calls for further transfers of powers and the federalisation of the Belgian state became a strategy to win office at the centre (Sorens, 2009: 256). This challenged the VU's issue ownership over self-government.

The Volksunie was included in government from 1977 to 1978, a party to the failed Egmont Pact which would have seen the federalisation of the Belgian state and the transfer of competences to Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. The party returned to the federal government from 1988 to 1991. However, following the federalisation of Belgium in 1993, the '*regional branches of the mainstream Flemish parties had become the main protagonists in the post-federalization phase*' (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009: 295). This left the Volksunie searching for purpose and ultimately, the party dissolved in 2001 into three rival factions representing different ideological viewpoints and degrees of radicalism emerged.

The party's framing of itself and its role recognised these challenging conditions, but it argued, as did the SNP, that it provided the most credible means of advancing the cause of self-government. In framing itself and its goals, the party (1) stressed its role as a voice for Flanders and self-government and (2) challenged the legitimacy of rival political parties to make the same claim. It then discussed its pursuit of self-government, simultaneously

emphasising its role as a (1) party of blackmail and (2) a party which embark upon principled participation.

6.2.2 The VU and its rivals: credibility and illegitimacy

The Volksunie argued that it alone could credibly advance the cause of self-government, serving as a genuine voice for Flanders in contrast to traditional rivals. A vote for the Volksunie was considered a vote for a party which could defend Flemish interests and advance the cause of self-government. It positioned itself as a democratic party, drawing a distinction between the anti-democratic tendencies of Flemish nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s, and one which stood apart from the highly pillarised Belgian system, allowing it to legitimately speak for Flanders.

The party's framing took two primary forms. Firstly, it focused on providing a voice for Flanders and Flemish self-government. The party avoided, in its early years, positioning itself ideologically but instead positioned itself as a big tent for all interested in the advancement of Flemish interests. This was closely linked with the VU's second frame, which challenged the legitimacy of traditional political rivals to speak for Flanders on the basis of their need to balance Flemish and Walloon interests. This frame had less resonance following the split of the traditional parties in the 1960s and 1970s. For the Volksunie, these two frames culminated in an argument that Flemish self-government was urgently needed and could only be achieved through the participation of the VU.

1. A voice for Flanders and Flemish self-government

Unlike the SNP which was able to credibly claim exclusivity in speaking on behalf of the Scottish nation, the Volksunie faced increasing competition in doing so, particularly as the traditional Belgian parties split and the Vlaams Blok emerged. However, it framed itself, like its Scottish counterpart, as a voice for Flanders – both for Flemish interests and for Flemish self-government. It did so by emphasising its outsider status, one that rose above what it considered as petty concerns about pillars and class.

The Volksunie took various ideological standpoints throughout its history, but the prevailing narrative of the party focused on its ability to transcend the deep divisions of class and religion of the pillarised Belgian system. This transcendence was to allow the Volksunie to faithfully and fully represent Flemish interests. As a result, it advocated a big tent nationalism, appealing to '*young and old, to farmers and workers, for labourers and intellectuals,*

for self-employed people' (VU, 1955). The VU, unique amongst its counterparts, was to reject pillarisation, saying '*we believe that the Flemish question is a national matter for the Flemish people, as such it includes all sectors of society, it is not just a language issue, a cultural issue, a social or economic issue, but these together',* a critique of attempts by traditional parties to come to an agreement on the language issues (VU, 1961). It was to be a party that did not align itself along traditional lines and was therefore unencumbered by entrenched interests, as '*a democratic party that does not favour the left, nor the right, but forward!*' (VU, 1965). It was '*different from the others*', independent from both big business and the unions (VU, 1965). It could, therefore, speak for all Flemings.

Even as it achieved a high degree of systemic relevance, the VU continued to stress its outsider status, positioning itself as both able to maintain its independence, in contrast to traditional rivals, while engaging constructively in favour of state reform. It was, as a result of this outsider status, the only engine of innovation, acting without constraint from other actors (VU, 1971).

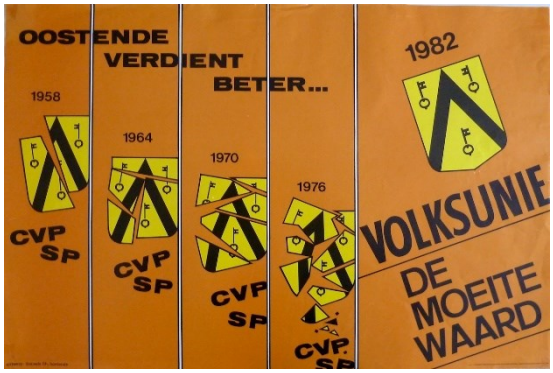
The fate of Flanders and the fate of the Volksunie were closely linked, with the party arguing '*It is no coincidence that the undeniable rise of Flanders coincides with the rise of the People's Union*' (VU, 1971). It was, in its self-definition, uniquely positioned to represent all of Flanders, positioning itself '*in the service of the national community*' (VU, 1979). It framed itself as a necessary actor given the inability of traditional parties to adequately represent the interests of Flemish voters. It described itself as *the Flemish National Party (Vlaamse Nationale Partij*) and in the 1990s, the party added '*Volksnationale partij*' to its descriptor as a means of distinguishing between the VU and rivals who had all increasingly emphasised their Flemish identities.

2. The illegitimacy of political rivals

Closely linked with the framing of the VU as a voice for Flanders, and for Flemish self-government was a critique of political rivals – in their ability to speak for Flanders and to credibly pursue federalisation and far-reaching state reform. This was true for both traditional rivals, with Flemish leaders called out for particular censure, and for the Vlaams Blok which emerged as a faction within the Volksunie and throughout the 1980s and 1990s challenged the party on self-government (Govaert, 1993: 18).

In the VU's 1956 congress text, it outlined the problems of the Belgian state and its negative effects on Flanders, including the underrepresentation of Flemings, the failure to enforce the language border, and discrimination. These problems were not placed at the feet of Francophones exclusively, but to the failure of Flemings within the traditional parties to defend Flemish interests (VU, 1956). These parties, and in particular, Flemings within them, were challenged on their track record and ability to speak for Flanders, due to the '*lamentable attitude of Flemish regional representatives of the Flemish people'* (VU, 1955). The Christian Democrats, the largest party in Belgium, was targeted for its failure to wield its Flemish majority, and its efforts to block the Volksunie were described as '*Machiavellian political processes*' (VU, 1959). Within the unitary party system, socialist, liberal, and Christian Democrat rivals were painted with a broad brush, denounced for selling out Flanders, lacking pride, courage, and engaging in a slavish submission to Brussels and Wallonia (VU, 1965). A vote for traditional parties was '*a lost vote for Flanders*' with '*only the Volksunie having the power and capability to use Flemish votes to guarantee a better and happier future for the people*' (VU, 1965).

These parties, according to the Volksunie, were unable to deliver meaningful self-government and were merely responding to the electoral threat posed by the Volksunie rather than possessing a real commitment to state reform. Proposals for further reforms were rejected as they represented efforts to thwart the Flemish majority and viewed as a conspiracy against real reform (VU, 1959; VU, 1962; VU, 1965). The VU described proposed changes to the linguistic laws in the 1960s as mechanisms which would '*render us forever helpless and deprives us of the only weapon we have as Flemings: the power of our democratic number*' (VU, 1965). The failure of traditional rivals to block these reforms was evidence that '*there is no freedom of action for the Flemings. Against his better judgement, the Flemish parliamentarian must vote with the major parties*' (VU, 1965).



A 1982 flyer published by the Volksunie in Ostende portrayed a unified Volksunie in contrast to increasingly fragmented political rivals.

The failure of efforts by traditional parties to deliver on their promises of state reform was attributed to internal divisions within the traditional parties, an insufficient commitment to genuine reform, and their collusion within the Belgian state. Proposals for further reform or efforts to co-opt the position of the VU were met with scepticism. Following the failure of the Egmont Pact negotiations, the Volksunie attributed blame to these parties, saying '*The so-called Traditional parties are mutually and internally so deeply divided on the constitutional reform that they do not have the strength to set a clear course and deliver a sustained policy*' (VU, 1978). In the aftermath, the party intensified its rhetoric, continually calling into question the credibility and commitment of rivals to Flemish interests and good politics (VU, 1979). Within the ranks of the Flemish traditional parties were unionists, who had attempted to thwart state reform (VU, 1978). Even as the parties split along linguistic lines and reoriented towards the region, the VU challenged the credibility of these claims given their past behaviour.

The party's emphasis on its democratic credentials had relevance early on in its lifespan, as it saw the need to distance itself from predecessors who were associated with fascism and collaboration with German occupiers and later on, when the Vlaams Blok emerged, adopting a platform in favour of Flemish independence and against immigration. By the elections of 1991, the VB had surpassed the VU in electoral support (Mudde, 1995: 6). The Vlaams Blok was rarely named directly in the party's documents, instead referring to Flemish nationalism '*as represented by other parties*' (VU, 1979). The VU focused on reaffirming its commitment to the democratic pursuit of self-government and an open nationalism, encompassing '*respect for the well-being and individualism of other people*' and '*at once pluralist, tolerant, hospitable and altruistic*' (VU, 1979; VU, 1995). The electoral breakthroughs of the Vlaams Bloc encouraged the Volksunie to further emphasise its democratic credentials, positioning itself as the democratic manifestation of Flemish nationalism, in contrast to the anti-democratic, narrow nationalism espoused by its radical rivals. It reaffirmed its commitment to participation – both in the democratic process and in

government to emphasise these differences from the VB which had become a party of permanent opposition (VU, 1995). Flemish self-government could not, in the view of the VU, be credibly pursued by anti-democratic parties.

The behaviour of both the traditional parties, with their disingenuous commitment to self-government, and the Vlaams Blok, with its anti-system stance, was used to justify the VU's claim to be a voice for Flanders, and the only party which could genuinely advance the cause of self-government. This was done through both blackmail and participation at the centre, a position from which it could hold traditional parties to account.

6.2.3 The pursuit of self-government: blackmail and coalition

The Belgian party system has been characterised by dramatic changes – the split of the traditional parties, the emergence of regionalist parties in Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels, and the rise of far-right parties with a nationalist orientation. Belgium moved from a highly pillarised system to one characterised by plurality (De Winter et al, 2006). While the Scottish party system underwent its most significant changes with devolution, party system change in Belgium preceded federalisation. By the time federalisation occurred in 1993, the party system had been split for nearly two decades. These party system dynamics, as well as the norm of coalition governments, shaped the party's understanding of how self-government could be pursued.

Rather than be excluded from coalition, regionalist parties were considered for inclusion, allowing traditional parties to bolster their regionalist credentials whilst and seek consensus on state reform, as well as secure the necessary majority. The Volksunie was a particularly attractive partner; their inclusion was viewed it as a means of bolstering support for traditional parties in Flanders and *'forcing them to make policy compromises and share responsibility for some unpopular socio-economic policies*' (De Winter, 1998: 235-7).

The party's framing of its role within the party system took two forms, with a distinct temporal dimension. Until the 1960s, it framed itself as a party of opposition, stressing its blackmail potential and ability to place the issue of Flemish self-government on the political agenda. From the 1970s onwards, as support for the party grew and opportunities emerged in the increasingly fragmented party space, it employed a frame of principled participation, open to participation in governing coalitions. The party justified this

approach by arguing genuine Flemish nationalist input, in contrast to the obstructionist approach of the VB, was necessary at the centre.

1. A party of blackmail

Volksunie election advert depicting the party as a jockey for Liberal, Christian Democratic, and Socialist horses, encouraging them to adopt state reform.

The VU's success within the electoral arena was notable, passing the threshold of representation at its first election and gaining seats thereafter. In 1965, the Volksunie became the fourth largest party in Belgium, achieving systemic relevance and challenging traditional parties to take a stance on the community issue. At this point, it saw itself as a party of opposition – focused on holding the government to account and challenging the traditional parties who were indebted to the traditional regime. It describes the desperate need for a Flemish party

> *'because the other parties and the government are neglecting traditional Flemish interests and set us back. An independent, strong Flemish opposition is required to denounce this backwards movement, neglect, discrimination, and place pressure'*
>
> VU, 1965.

However, this emphasis on the party as one of blackmail was short-lived, as its electoral success increased and the issue of state reform settled on the agenda.

2. A party of principled participation

Unlike many of its sub-state nationalist counterparts elsewhere, the Volksunie explicitly oriented itself towards government, believing genuine self-government could only be achieved with the cooperation of the Volksunie. It situated its participation within a frame of principles and bravery, made more salient by the fact that its participation often came at a high cost to the party.

While sometimes sceptical of the motives of traditional parties in their pursuit of state reform, it was willing to participate – both to ensure reforms took place and improve them (Van Haute, 2011: 212). This frame of participation was stressed alongside blackmail potential – not across a multilevel system or from outside of government but from inside the governing coalition, with the VU pledging to hold coalition partners to account. In 1971, with the inclusion of regionalist parties in coalition mooted, the VU stressed that while only federalism could provide a solution to Belgium's problems, '*it confirms its willingness to cooperate with all responsible intermediate solutions, provided it does not inhibit the further development of federalism*' (VU, 1971). It declared itself willing to join a coalition government in 1973 and asserted its relevance in 1974, saying '*The Volksunie, therefore, has real power. The other parties are obliged to be called to account*' (VU, 1974).

This power, according to the VU, could be exercised inside or outside of government. Although talks failed, the party was well situated to enter into government after the 1977 election, where it had again performed well, receiving 10% of the total Belgian vote and 20 seats. Participation was principled and brave and the inclusion of the Volksunie was necessary - serving as an engine of innovation but also as a threat to traditional parties within the coalition. This participationist frame was contested within the party, and led, following the failure of the Egmont Pact, to more radical actors peeling off into different factions.

Despite its negative experience in government following the 1978 elections and the internal disputes which followed, the party stressed its commitment to participate in government, focusing on this as a principled choice (VU, 1979). It was in the words of the party '*a valiant attempt to break through this paralysis. By participating in government, we wanted to implement irreversible reforms: creating a Flemish deelstaat that, despite imperfections, would allow for further growth*' (VU, 1978). Although it adopted a more radical position on self-government in this period, it remained committed to participation, '*even in difficult and unpopular conditions*' (VU, 1978). It argued genuine Flemish nationalists '*should focus on the pursuit of effective participation and the presence of conscious nationalists in the political process*' (VU, 1979). Faced with a nascent Vlaams Blok, the VU focused on its democratic objectives, defining itself as pursuing '*power through parliamentary democracy and consequentially by acquiring voters from competition in elections*' (VU, 1979). The reforms of 1970 and 1980, made in the absence of the Volksunie, were considered weaker for it (VU, 1987). The party asserted its continued

relevance, arguing that it was '*much more than a whip party*', and could not be reduced to an '*electoral bogeyman*' to incentivize the achievement of Flemish demands by rival parties, but should be seen as a legitimate operator (VU, 1989).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, as state reform appeared inevitable, the VU reaffirmed its commitment to participation, saying '*Someone needs to stick his neck out*', stressing the need for principled participation (VU, 1991). The party employed a dual frame of principled participation and blackmail to justify both its entry and exit from government.

> *'We do not have to be ashamed for our participation in government. Only our programme, for which we have a mandate from voters, counted for us. That's why we left power voluntarily when we determined that they wanted to send us off. We were the only ones who dared to say "No!" to the dictates of the Walloons, while the other parties clung to power'*
>
> VU, 1991.

The party continued to emphasise its blackmail role, attributing federalisation to the pressure it had applied to mainstream parties. (VU, 1993). However, for the Volksunie, participation at the centre would further the cause of Flemish self-government, even if it took place at a slower pace than the party might have preferred. It continued to highlight the importance of elections in the '*struggle for political independence*' and explained '*It is the great merit of the Flemish Movement that the Volksunie, as a political party, has always opted for evolution*', emphasising the peaceful and democratic nature of the movement (VU, 1995). Federalisation did little to change this – with state reform presumed to originate at the centre rather than at sub-state level of government.

The VU's rapid rise to relevance, as well as its early participation in government at the centre, placed challenges on it to define itself, particularly vis-à-vis rivals who increasingly claimed to represent the Flemish nation. The Volksunie's framing of itself and the party system reflected a need to be seen as both an outsider, willing to transcend pillarization and disrupt the status quo, but also to be acceptable as a prospective partner of coalition. It, therefore, spoke simultaneously of blackmail and coalition, framed as principled participation.

The VU's approach to participation was enabled by several factors: its more moderate self-government goals which could be pursued gradually and within the context of the Belgian system, the structure of the party system where it was conceivable regionalist

parties would be included, and a sense that, both pre- and post-federalisation, self-government would come from negotiations at the centre rather than direct action at the sub-state level. Federalisation had an effect on the Belgian party system, contributing to increasing asymmetry between the parties of Wallonia and Flanders but did not require a fundamental change in the party system. It did, however, make it more challenging for the VU to claim exclusivity in representing the Flemish cause. Squeezed between the increasingly Flemish-oriented traditional parties and the more radical nationalist Vlaams Blok, it struggled to retain its systemic relevance. This had important implications for the strategy of the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie.

6.3 The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie in a regionalised Flemish party space

The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie emerged into a crowded and fragmented party space, and the dissolution of the Volksunie into three separate parties further contributed to this fragmentation. De Winter et al (2006: 939) identifies a tendency towards the '*volksunie-sation*' of Flemish parties as MPs and members disbanded to the Christian Democrats, Liberals, and Socialists, taking their calls for further Flemish self-government with them.

In response to the fragmentation, an electoral threshold of five percent was introduced, aimed at the successors of the Volksunie, with the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie to be the principal victim (Cadrenel, 2003: 59; Onclin, 2009: 11; Hooghe et al, 2006: 357; Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011: 638). Flemish Christian Democrats, Liberals, and Socialists were also undertaking processes of organisational reforms, evident in the name changes with all three undertaking rebranding between 1999 and 2007, adding Vlaams to their names to stress their Flemish identity (Erk, 2005; Trefois & Faniel, 2007). There was a consensus on the need for further reforms found in the 1999 *Handvest voor Vlaanderen* and the resolutions by the Flemish Parliament in favour of the further transfer of power to Flanders (Swenden, 2013: 5). As a result, there is '*outbidding*' amongst the traditional parties to position themselves as the party which best reflects Flemish interests (De Winter, 2012: 17).

To ensure its survival, the N-VA entered into an alliance under the header of a *Flemish Cartel* in 2004 with the Flemish Christian Democrats (CD&V) who were outside of office and keen to burnish their Flemish nationalist credentials (Van Haute, 2011: 205; Hooghe

et al, 2006: 365). This put the party in an interesting position, clearly an outsider but allied with a traditional party. The alliance was perceived as a *'radicalisation*' by the traditional Flemish parties and led to a reiteration of the Francophone parties' commitment to the status quo (Deschouwer, 2013: 341). The cartel was at the outset, a success. The so-called *Flemish Cartel* gained 26 percent of the votes at the Flemish regional elections, allowing CD&V to head the regional government and N-VA to enter the governing coalition as well as secure six seats in the Flemish Parliament. The parties were able to join together in the federal elections to push forward their manifesto commitments (Deschouwer, 2007). However, the parties remained distinct, issuing separate manifestos in addition to a common electoral platform (Dandoy et al, 2013: 334). Although closely aligned ideologically, tensions emerged between the parties over how the parties should behave in and outside of government. In the government formation process following the 2007 election, N-VA decided to support the government while not joining it (Van Haute, 2011: 205). In September 2007, in response to tensions between the two parties, party founder Geert Bourgeois resigned from his post in the Flemish Government, placing the N-VA in opposition at the federal and regional level (Van Haute, 2011: 205).

As a party which emerged from the disintegration of the Volksunie, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie faced unique challenges as well as opportunities in defining itself – ideologically, politically, and strategically – in a crowded Flemish party space. In the first dimension of interest in this research, the framing of the party and its political rivals in pursuit of self-government, the party employs several frames: (1) the N-VA as a moral leader in pursuit of self-government; (2) the complicity of traditional rivals; and (3) the futility of the Vlaams Belang and its cause. It also frames the pursuit of self-government directly, employing one key frame in its comparatively short lifespan (1), the courage to abstain, particularly at the centre. This frame is linked with the limited opportunities available to it, given the Parti Socialiste's rejection of any further Flemish demands as well as the party's frame of moral leadership. Unlike its rivals, the N-VA claims, it is a policy-seeking party rather than office-seeking. This position shifted in advance of the 2014 elections and will be discussed in detail in chapter seven.

6.3.1 The N-VA and its rivals: morality, complicity, and futility

Given the fragmented nature of the Belgian party system and the circumstances of its origins, the N-VA had to define itself and its self-government goal in the context of a

regionalised Flemish party space and in light of its own political legacy. It attempted to do so by positioning itself as a new party, representing a departure from traditional methods, as well as an old one, building on the legacy of the Volksunie. Beyens et al (2015) assess the '*newness*' of the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, examining its electoral functions and strategy, membership, and supporters. They conclude that the party at its origins owed much to the Volksunie, but became more new over time, '*a result of a conscious choice to really build a new party*' (Beyens et al, 2015). In the party's statement of principles, it stressed both history and novelty, '*building on 45 years of successful work*', but with a '*renewed, ambitious task*' (N-VA, 2001). It described itself as having risen from the '*ruins*' of the Volksunie and having its lessons (Beyens et al, 2015). It rejected some of the more recent Volksunie proposals which represented an attempts to reposition the VU as a more socially progressive party. The N-VA continually made reference to the positive legacy of the Volksunie but also pledged to learn from its mistakes, most notably its repeated entry into government at such a high cost.

It positioned itself and its role within the party system by emphasising two key frames. Firstly, the N-VA framed itself as a moral leader, an outlier in the Belgian political system, a position linked with its abstention from government and its gradualist pursuit of self-government. Secondly, and closely linked to this first frame, it critiqued its Flemish rivals, both nationalist and mainstream for their behaviour within the Belgian political space.

1. A moral leader

The party framed itself as a moral leader – in contrast with its traditional counterparts who were willing to abandon principles to enter office, and the Vlaams Belang which was detrimental to the Flemish nationalist cause. This moral leadership was closely linked with its stance on participation in government and also with its gradualist pursuit of its self-government goals.

The party adopted a clear ideological standpoint, but maintained the outsider ethos of the Volksunie, pledging to act in the Flemish interests and the name of Flemish self-government, rather than catering to more narrow pillars that defined traditional Flemish parties. It described itself as '*uniquely unbound*', rather than beholden to pillars, pressure groups, or financial interests (N-VA, 2003). Although its ideological position differed from its predecessor, the party adopted the VU's call for clean politics, pledging to offer

'*more content, less packaging*', with a code of ethics for its representatives (N-VA, 2001; 2003). This consistent narrative of the party as a moral outsider was supported by Bart de Wever's position outside of government, which allowed him to critique both the regional and federal government (Rochtus, 2012). Critiques of the N-VA as an outsider suggested to the party it was doing something right, refusing to be co-opted by the Belgian state and its entrenched political interests.

The party also employed this frame of moral leadership to justify its gradualist approach to the pursuit of self-government, saying it was wholly committed to Flemish independence within Europe but acknowledging public opinion did not support this. In an interview in the media, Eric Defoort, one of the party's co-founders explained why the N-VA would not take action towards independence. '*The N-VA has no intention of betraying the million voters who placed their trust in us last June. The 27% of Flemings who voted for us did not vote for Flemish independence but the fundamental restructuring of this state*' (Le Soir, 2012). Jan Jambon, head of the N-VA in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives says of independence '*Flemish independence, it is in our statute. But we are also a democratic party, and we know very well that in Flanders, there is not a majority which wants Flemish independence*' (Jambon, 2014). Its commitment to respecting public preferences was used to fend off charges of radicalism as well as justify its gradualist approach to its supporters..

2. The complicity of traditional Flemish rivals

Traditional Flemish rivals were understood as complicit, co-opted into the Belgian system and possessing an insufficient commitment to Flemish self-government. Traditional Flemish parties have advocated for the further transfer of powers and have each included, at various points, confederalism in their political platforms. However, for the traditional parties, confederalism is used '*to signal that they want to go beyond the current state of federalism, but without envisaging the split-up of Belgium*' (De Winter, 2012: 28). As a result, the party faced competition on its self-government goals from more established political rivals. It responded by attacking Flemish rivals aggressively, challenging their credibility in pursuing self-government, their failed records, and their behaviour, both in and out of government. These charges were rooted in a core argument, that Flemish parties had been corrupted by their participation in government at the centre, motivated by self-interest and harbouring Belgiciste tendencies. As a result, in the eyes of the N-VA, they were unable to defend Flemish interests and serve as an engine of change.

The N-VA focused its critiques on the moral frailty of its Flemish counterparts, lacking the convictions of the Flemish nationalists. This was a result of their participation at the centre, which is perceived to have a corrupting influence. The party called, in the context of the coalition negotiations, on other Flemish parties to commit themselves, to '*have for once the Flemish ambition to persevere*' (Kukula, 2008). Until 2014, entry into government was portrayed as motivated by self-interest rather than the interests of Flanders.

The N-VA's critiques shifted, shaped by perceptions of competition as well as the constraints of electoral cartels. While in an electoral cartel with the CD&V, the party focused its critiques on the Liberals, as a party of government, accusing it of betrayal of Flemish interests. In its 2007 manifesto, the party claimed '*Liberals can no longer call themselves Flemings but are Flamingante Belgians, and Flanders deserves better*' (N-VA, 2007). The CD&V, outside of government in 1999 for the first time since 1958, and keen to burnish its Flemish nationalist credentials, was described carefully. As the two parties entered into cartel, the N-VA stressed that while they were distinct, they shared a common goal of a more radical reform of the state (N-VA, 2004).

The end of the cartel and the party's exit from regional government allowed it to sharpen its criticisms, and situate itself as the moral party in advance of the 2009 regional elections. The decision of the CD&V to participate in government at the centre, taking on the Prime Minister post, was described by De Wever in a media interview as '*incredible*' and as '*crossing the valley of shame*' (La Libre, 2008). Its decision was taken as a betrayalof the N-VA, the principles of self-government, and the interest of Flanders. When asked about the possibility of a renewed cartel in advance of the 2009 elections, De Wever replied '*The cartel, it's finished. The CD&V did not keep any of its electoral promises. The king is naked, the CD&V is naked*' (La Libre, 2008). The decision to form a government on the basis of the proposals of the Parti Socialiste was discussed as a betrayal, '*a clear decision made by the CD&V and all of the traditional Flemish parties*' to enter into government and abandon any prospect of institutional reform (N-VA, 2011). The party continued to stress its disappointment with the actions of Flemish parties, with de Wever saying,following the formation of a federal government in 2011, '*I am disappointed, and I hope that they will gain or regain the political courage to say, 'no, we were mistaken*' (Daout, 2011).

This focus on political rivals – as a disappointment, having sold out Flemish interests in the pursuit of office – was to position the party to capitalise on disillusionment with traditional parties as well as distinguish itself in a crowded party space – both in terms of the overall number of parties but also one in which multiple visions of state reform, beyond federalism, were on offer. The failure of these parties to achieve significant state reform whilst in government suggested only the N-VA, as an outsider and one willing to maintain its moral position, could achieve meaningful progress on state reform and stand up to the Parti Socialiste.

3. The futility of the Vlaams Belang and its cause

The N-VA, like its predecessor, was squeezed – between the traditional Flemish parties which called for further state reform and emphasised their Flemish credentials, and the far-right Vlaams Belang, which co-opted, and in the view of the N-VA, tainted the cause of Flemish nationalism (Wauters, 2005: 336). In 2004, the VB received 24.15% of the votes in the Flemish Parliamentary elections, and while it declined in subsequent years, it posed a threat to the nascent N-VA. In response, the party framed the VB as pursuing a futile cause and serving as a hindrance to Flemish nationalism. The N-VA was careful to draw a distinction between its own civic, democratic nationalism with the ethnic, xenophobic nationalism of the VB, arguing Flemish self-government could not be pursued in such a manner.

The N-VA acknowledged both parties were Flemish nationalists, but beyond their belief in Flemish self-government, they shared no similarities. De Wever described the VB as waving the same flag, but with insurmountable differences in both motives and content. De Wever explained '*The N-VA is in favour of negotiation, it is for the European Union. It is for the negotiated independence of Flanders in the European framework....*' and pledged to respect the cordon sanitaire imposed by Flemish parties (La Libre, 2008). De Wever described the differences directly: '*There are two choices when one is a Flemish nationalist: one can wish, like us, to change things by participating in change or one can be hostile to Belgium, like the Vlaams Belang, in rejecting all participation in the system'* (La Libre, 2008). Self-government was not within the remit of the VB and it in fact served as a hindrance to those seeking self-government.

> *'And it complicates the task of others. Because it places the demand for Flemish autonomy in the context of racism and the extreme right. It has become very easy for Francophones to*

> *say 'You've seen who the Flemish autonomists are, their project has a very interesting tone'. If the Vlaams Belang did not exist, the Francophones would have to invent it'*
>
> de Wever, 2008.

The collapse of the Vlaams Belang and the rise of the N-VA allowed for Flemings to advocate for self-government in a democratic and respectable fashion. The success of the N-VA was a victory for Flemish nationalists in pursuit of their goals but also a moral victory, ensuring '*Flanders no longer has to bear the stigma of an extreme right*' (De Morgen, 2012). The VB's losses in the 2009 contest were hailed as allowing Flemish independence to become a '*negotiable and honourable endeavour*' (Van Baelen, 2009). For those who voted for the VB on the basis of its independence platform, the N-VA provided a credible alternative.

6.3.2 The pursuit of self-government: principled abstention

From its origins, the N-VA declared itself open to participation in the federal government, using its willingness to participate as a marker of distinction between itself and its far-right political rivals. It did, however, set out conditions under which it would do so, requiring the 1999 resolutions of the Flemish Parliament be honoured in the coalition agreement. It learnt lessons from the Volksunie, which had entered into government without securing a sufficient commitment to self-government. As a result, the party opted to exercise its blackmail rather than coalition potential at the centre, focusing on influencing traditional Flemish parties. De Winter (2012: 19) attributes this to the party's unique approach to office, noting it is '*not an office-seeking party in the pure sense…Government participation is only considered legitimate by its militant rank-and-file when clear policy (and eventually electoral) gains are to be expected*'.

As a result, the N-VA employs a single frame during this period, reflecting competition across levels but also in response to emergent events. Although it declared itself open to participation, the majority of its discussions focused on the politics of abstention. It argues that it, unique among the Flemish parties, possesses the courage to abstain from government, a position which is closely linked with its frame of moral leadership. The party only formally committed itself to participation in the context of the 2014 election, discussed in the following chapter

1. The courage to abstain

While the Volksunie stressed its courage to participate, its successor focused on its courage to abstain, both from government entirely or from agreements or activities which it would violate its principles. In its 2003 manifesto, it pledged to refuse to join a federal government without an agreement on the transfer of powers on the economy, health, family policy, mobility, and taxation and it continued in this vein throughout its lifespan, arguing it would enter into government only if certain conditions were met (N-VA, 2003). Traditional Flemish parties, according to the N-VA, lacked this moral courage and were more interested in the spoils of office than the needs and interests of their Flemish constituents.

When in electoral cartel at the Flemish level, the N-VA employed what Deschouwer defines as a halfway house strategy '*supporting the government only on those items for which the party ideology and the policy proposals do not need to be stretched too far, allows a party to keep its ideological identity much 'cleaner' than when it has to share responsibility for all government decisions*' (2008: 13). In general, though, it focused on building support. At the Flemish Government level, it was more likely to participate in governing coalition, seeing it as an opportunity to further Flemish interests, even if state reform was not to be pursued at this level. The 2009 manifesto for the Flemish Parliament elections had an interesting introduction to its policy proposals: '*This programme is written on the basis of the expansionary use of powers Flanders has already. The power to carry out further measures to ensure welfare and prosperity for six million Flemings unfortunately still belong to the Belgian state*' (N-VA, 2009).

The 2010 federal elections brought the divergence between Francophones and Flemings into sharper focus, the victory of the N-VA in Flanders and the Parti Socialiste in Wallonia emphasising the '*radicalization in the electoral politics of Belgium*' (Abts et al, 2012). The N-VA called on Flemish parties to refuse to participate in federal governments which lacked a majority in Flanders. (N-VA, 2010: 6). It acknowledged the risks of participation were acute. '*If we join such a government, there is a great risk of losing the next election. We were elected because we support radical changes and because the voters trust us not to cave after six months of negotiations*' (de Wever, 2010). The decision to form a government on the basis of the proposals of the Parti Socialiste was discussed as a betrayal, '*a clear decision made by the CD&V and all of the traditional Flemish parties*' to enter into government and abandon any prospect of institutional reform (N-VA, 2011).

This positon was linked with the N-VA's moral leadership vis-à-vis political rivals, which were characterised as office-seeking with an insufficient commitment to the principle of Flemish self-government. Both its initial participation and its ultimate withdrawal were portrayed as brave choices, with a potential cost to the N-VA but a cost worth paying in order to hold fast to the party's principles. The failure of government negotiations was also employed as an opportunity to demonstrate that Belgium was dysfunctional, unable to govern itself because of the divergent interests contained within it. Abstention allowed it to make the case that, between 2010 and 2014, there was not a parliamentary majority among Flemish parties, further highlighting the undemocratic and dysfunctional nature of the Belgian state.

Unlike its predecessor, which approached participation as an obligation of a responsible nationalist party, the N-VA was, until 2014, more willing to emphasise its systemic relevance in the form of its blackmail, focusing on the threat it posed to traditional parties and its moral leadership in the face of their actions, feeling more could be achieved by abstention than participation. This changed in the run-up to the 2014 election when political rivals began to brand the N-VA as obstructionist, or a party of permanent opposition. Its move from a party of principled abstention to one of coalition was attributed to principles rather than opportunism.

The N-VA had a unique opportunity to build on the legacy and achievements of the Volksunie, maintaining many of its institutional resources. It also faced significant constraints – a crowded party system, the introduction of an electoral threshold which seemed designed to eliminate the N-VA, and the existence and high levels of support for a more radical nationalist competitor. These conditions shaped the party's framing of itself and its self-government goal.

In response, it attempted to position itself as an outsider and a moral leader and used these frames to justify both abstention from the government at the centre, and participation at the Flemish level where Flemish interests, if not self-government, could be advanced. It also shaped the framing of its political rivals, particularly from the ranks of the traditional Flemish parties – who lacked convictions and were office-seeking, willing to enter into government at the expense of policy.

The N-VA's positioning of itself within the Belgian party system shared many similarities with its predecessor – it stressed the necessity of a democratic Flemish nationalist party to serve as a voice for Flanders and a moral arbiter, pressuring Flemish counterparts into taking state reform seriously. However, it argued it had learned the lessons of the Volksunie and would take a harder line on participation.

6.4 Self-government and the party system: understandings of the self, the other, and the system

In all three cases, self-government was considered to be subject to electoral competition rather than broader public mobilisation or revolution. As a result, the parties and their goals were made with reference to the party system. This was evident in how they framed themselves and their political rivals and the pursuit of self-government within a party system. All three made a claim to speak for the nation and its interests and challenged the credibility of rivals in doing so. For the SNP and the Volksunie, this was more explicit, focusing on the two parties as a voice for Scotland and Flanders respectively. This was less apparent in the N-VA's framing, which focused on the party as a moral leader.

Table: Framing the Party System and the Pursuit of Self-government

Dimensions	*SNP*	*VU*	*N-VA*
1. The party and its rivals	*Scotland's Party, Scotland's voice* *The illegitimacy of political rivals*	*A voice for Flanders and for self-government* *The illegitimacy of political rivals*	*A moral leader* *The complicity of traditional rivals* *The futility of the Vlaams Belang*
2. The party and its pursuit of self-government	*A party of action* *A party of blackmail* *A party of government*	*A party of blackmail* *A party of principled participation*	*The courage to abstain*

However, self-government was not the only purpose of the parties in question. They also sought, in the absence of self-government, to pursue and defend the interests of their

respective nations and these two goals were used to justify their participation, in legislative bodies and some instances, in government.

The means by which self-government was to be pursued and the emphasis of each party on its systemic relevance also reflected the nature of their respective party system. For the SNP pre-devolution, this took the form of securing the majority of Scottish seats at Westminster, a vote for the SNP seen as providing a mandate for a declaration of independence. As a result, it pledged to participate in parliament, if not in government, and pursue both self-government and, in the interim, Scottish interests. It continually made reference to its blackmail relevance – placing Scottish issues on the political agenda, threatening the seats of statewide parties, and encouraging statewide parties to support a limited form of self-government for Scotland. The SNP was, until devolution, able to frame itself as the sole supporter of Scottish self-government, challenging parties who were organisationally centralised. Devolution required a new strategy – positioning itself within the Scottish Parliament as a party of prospective government, and by virtue of its participation, of independence, and at Westminster as a party of opposition or a blackmail actor.

For the VU and N-VA, self-government was to be negotiated at the centre and participation in the governing coalition was necessary to further these goals. Early on, the Volksunie saw the opportunity from participation at the centre and framed this as a necessary and courageous act, justifying participation as an opportunity to make better policy and hold parties to account. State reform and the shift in political opportunity structures took place in threekey stages: the split of the traditional parties along linguistic lines, the introduction of a directly elected sub-state government, and finally the federalisation of the Belgian state. The Volksunie was largely willing to enter into government in order to be seen as participationist and pursue incremental reforms. This was a means both of pursuing self-government through negotiations at the centre but also, from the 1980s onwards, distinguishing itself from the anti-participationist Vlaams Blok. Participation in government was considered a brave choice, described as principled participation, and one which came at significant political costs.

The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie at its origins was cognisant of threats to its political survival, particularly in light of the introduction of the electoral threshold, but also of the demise

of its predecessor. Although declaring itself willing to enter into government at the centre should sufficient progress on state reform be achieved over the course of negotiations, it had stipulations for doing so and emphasised the courage to abstain when negotiations at the centre failed. While the Volksunie focused on its participation as a brave choice, the N-VA argued that its willingness to abstain was a symbol of its bravery – forsaking the spoils of office in pursuit of policy. The N-VA was, until 2014, willing to exercise its blackmail potential, using its exclusion from coalition as a means to undermine the Belgian system, highlighting that between 2010 and 2014, the government lacked a majority in Flanders. It was, however, conscious of the risk of being branded as a party of permanent opposition like the VB and this consideration informed its shift in advance of the 2014 elections.

The nature of the self-government pursued and the means by which it was to be achieved shaped each party's framing of itself, its rivals, and the system in which they operated. For both Flemish nationalist parties, self-government or the '*divorce des Belges*' was to be negotiated and achieved at the centre and participation in coalition (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009: 297). The Volksunie, with a more moderate self-government goal throughout much of its lifespan, was often willing to enter into government to pursue more modest aims. For the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, which seeks confederalism in the short-term and independence in the long-term, a more radical ambition than that of its competitor, the centre remains important although the party continued to stress the moral virtue of abstention. As a result, it had to outbid its traditional competitors but also render itself eligible for coalition. In contrast, post-devolution, Scottish independence was to be pursued through an SNP government, in power in Scotland, endorsed by the people at a referendum. Participation at this level served to position the party as one of government, providing the tools necessary to pursue its self-government objectives. It was also an opportunity to demonstrate Scotland's potential and the possibility that, unfettered by the current constitutional arrangement, even more could be achieved.

Chapter Seven: Self-government in 2014

The period between 2011 and 2014 was critical for the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie and the Scottish National Party, with the *mother of all elections* taking place in Belgium in May 2014 and Scotland's referendum on independence following in September. These events had their origins in 2011, with the SNP securing a majority and the N-VA abstaining from participation in the federal government, following the 2010 elections.

In autumn 2013, both parties published comprehensive accounts of their self-government goals: *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland*, the SNP-led Scottish Government's white paper on independence (ScotGov, 2013), and the N-VA's congress text and later manifesto, *Change for Progress* (N-VA, 2013). These represented the most comprehensive statements to date on the self-government goals of each party. The context in they were published differed, with *Scotland's Future* taking the form of a blueprint for constitutional change, detailing what might happen in the event of a yes vote. In contrast, the N-VA's proposal was presented as a more traditional party manifesto. Given the structure of the Belgian system, it was to serve as the basis for coalition negotiations should the party become *incontournable*, its participation mathematically necessary for any governing coalition.

Although 2014 was ultimately anti-climactic for both parties, with the SNP failing to secure a majority in favour of independence, and the N-VA placing its proposals for confederalism on the backburner in order to pursue more pressing socioeconomic reforms, the publications represent an important development in the lifespan of the two parties and provide an opportunity to compare the two proposals in detail.

In this final empirical chapter, I analyse the framing of independence and confederalism in the 2014 campaigns, drawing on the two documents as well as speeches, debates, media coverage, and interviews with party leadership, conducted in Flanders in February 2014 and in Scotland in summer 2014, and media coverage. My analysis focuses on the empirical contexts assessed in the three preceding chapters, examining the way in which self-government was framed in light of the international and European context, the existing state structure, and the party system. Given the level of detail included in these proposals, the 2014 campaigns provide a unique opportunity to assess meanings of self-government in the twenty-first century.

Each party will be addressed individually, beginning with a contextual introduction to each campaign and an assessment of (1) the ways in which self-government is defined and justified; and the framing of the (2) the international and European context; (3) the respective states and state structures; and (4) the party system in which these goals are pursued. I then conclude with a comparative discussion.

7.1 The Scottish National Party and a 2014 vision of independence

The Scottish National Party's journey towards a referendum began in May 2007, with the formation of the minority government. As a minority, it was unable to pass legislation on a referendum, or to argue that it had a mandate for doing so. It instead proceeded with the *National Conversations*, a series of public consultations which explored the options available to Scotland, defined as the status quo, further devolution as proposed by the Calman Commission, which was dismissed as overtaken by events, a more radical form of devolution '*devolution max*' and independence (ScotGov, 2000). It focused during this period on the business of government, aiming to showcase competent government and build support for Scottish independence (Leith & Steven, 2010). Mitchell (2016: 79) described the party's strategy as representing '*a fairly long campaign to get elected but not in making the case for independence*'.

The SNP was returned to government as a majority in 2011, following an election characterised as '*more Scottish than British*' (Carman et al, 2014). This victory, considered by political commentators as an '*emphatic victory*' and a '*watershed*' moment, was all the more notable for its occurrence in a system designed to prevent such an achievement (Hassan, 2011; see also Johns et al, 2013). Analysis of the 2011 election suggested the victory was won on the basis of '*performance politics'*, or perceptions of the SNP as more competent than its rivals (Johns et al, 2013; Dardanelli & Mitchell, 2014). The party's campaign reflected this strategy, with the 2011 manifesto titled *Re-elect a Scottish Government Working for Scotland* stressing competence rather than constitution (SNP, 2011). Increases in support for the party were not accompanied by increases in support for independence (Mitchell, 2016: 79).

The referendum was not within the powers of the Scottish Parliament, and required the temporary transfer of powers from Westminster to Holyrood. When this was agreed,

issues of process could give way to issues of substance, and the SNP set out comprehensive arguments in favour of independence as well as of outline how an independent Scotland would function. Following the election, the Edinburgh Agreement was negotiated with the UK government, allowing the referendum to take place and have binding effect (Kidd & Petrie, 2016: 29). The campaign was launched with the publication, on St Andrew's Day 2013, of *Scotland's Future: Your Guide to an Independent Scotland.* The campaign took place under the aegis of Yes Scotland, with the SNP as the dominant partner. In a *Holyrood Magazine* interview before the 2013 conference, Alex Salmond described the changing context in which the SNP operated, '*most SNP conferences have been dominated by the how we become independent…'* while in 2013, *'the job of this conference is to articulate the why*' (Rhodes, 2013).

The SNP's discussions of its self-government goal of political independence consisted of four main aspects, which will be discussed in turn in the following section. Firstly, it defined and justified self-government, stressing independence as a modern manifestation of this goal - one allowing for the realisation of self-determination but also specific policy objectives. Secondly, the party discussed independence in an international context, stressing that rather than isolating Scotland, independence would allow for an end to the separation imposed on Scotland by the union. Thirdly, it stressed self-government as a response to the state system which failed to serve Scotland, while simultaneously identifying aspects of the state which it wished to preserve. Finally, the SNP placed itself and its goals in the larger context of the party system, calling into question the ability of rivals to adequately represent Scottish interests.

7.1.1 Defining and contextualizing self-government

The Scottish Government defined independence simply as '*bring[ing] all the possibilities of full devolution with the additional responsibilities that could not be devolved within the United Kingdom, such as foreign affairs and defence*' (ScotGov, 2009). In 2013, with the publication of *Scotland's Future*, we saw increased detail about the party's conception of independence. From a legal perspective, independence was defined in traditional terms as the possession of international legal personality and membership in international organisations (ScotGov, 2013: 3). However, the SNP advanced a unique vision of independence. In his 2012 Arthur Donaldson speech at the SNP party conference, former MSP Andrew Wilson captured the nuances of the party's conception of independence, describing it as 'a

changing, elusive and tantalising objective' but also as *'an imperative for creating the economy and society we seek*' (Wilson, 2013a).

The party's definition of independence becomes more complex when we examine the content of the SNP's proposals. This can be understood, in the party's view, in light of six unions which an independent Scotland would leave, maintain, or modify. The SNP proposed to (1) end the parliamentary union, transferring sovereignty from the UK Parliament to the Scottish people; (2) whilst remaining in the Union of Crowns; (3) and the European Union as a successor; (4) preserving the social union of the British Isles; (5) and the sterling currency union, with the addition of direct input on the management of the currency for Scotland; (6) and NATO membership, although Trident would be removed from Scottish waters and Scotland would participate as a non-nuclear weapons state (ScotGov, 2013).

The SNP acknowledged the changing meaning of independence as reflecting both the limits of states and the role played by the international community. It used these interdependencies to justify cooperation with the rest of the UK and a high degree of international cooperation, arguing these were not inconsistent with independent statehood. Stephen Noon, research director at Yes Scotland and formerly a special adviser to the SNP Government, drew a distinction between twenty-first century independence, as advanced by the SNP and '*old-fashioned views*' of statehood. He contested the notion that this was a strategic retreat, arguing rather that it was '*a reflection of deeply-held principles and a world view that sees partnership and co-operation as the best way or ordering relationships between nations*' (Noon, 2013). In this context, relationships could be pursued on equal terms. '*The independence we propose reflects the realities of an increasingly inter-dependent world and is based upon a firm commitment to partnership and co-operation*' (ScotGov, 2013). Independence was understood as the ability to integrate rather than separate Scotland from the rest of the world.

Although commentators argued this version of independence was independence-lite, the party countered with the argument that all nations operate within constraints and have chosen to pool sovereignty to tackle common challenges. Independence, in the view of the SNP, would provide Scotland with the means of participating directly in this process. The frame of '*normal nationhood*' returned, entailing '*the ability to take our own decisions, in the*

same way as other countries', with both the opportunities and constraints that entails (SNP, 2011).

1. Independence as a tool: framing the purpose of self-government

In speeches, policy documents, and the white paper, independence was repeatedly framed as an instrumental goal, rooted in specific policy goals, rather than value rationality, or a matter of principle. The campaign stressed pragmatic aspects of independence which would provide the tools necessary to further Scotland's prosperity and wellbeing. In a June 2014 speech at the Edinburgh Centre for Constitutional Law, then Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon addressed the issue of the purpose of nationalism and independence directly, drawing on Neil MacCormick's distinction between existential nationalists, those who support independence as a fundamental principle, and utilitarian nationalists, who associate independence with the ability to pursue policy goals.

> *'The debate we are having is a very practical debate. A utilitarian debate. It is about the economy. It is about jobs. It is about welfare. It's about our natural resources, the provision of childcare, membership of the EU. And whether with independence we would be better off or not'*
>
> Sturgeon, 2014.

Independence is motivated by policy or a commitment to democracy and social justice rather than identity (Sturgeon, 2012).The argument in favour of independence was consistently framed in these terms, with Alex Salmond writing in the introductory letter of the Scottish Government's pre-referendum document, *Your Scotland, Your Referendum* *'Scotland is not oppressed and we have no need to be liberated. Independence matters because we do not have the powers to reach our potential. We are limited in what we can do to create jobs, grow the economy and help the vulnerable'* (ScotGov, 2012). MSP Bruce Crawford's Scotsman lecture on the referendum legislation stressed independence as a means, rather than an end goal, *'Our purpose is to reform the relationship between the people and the state, and to have a state which better reflects the will of the people'* (Crawford, 2012). Former MSP Andrew Wilson reiterates this in his Donaldson lecture, saying *'There is no pot of gold, black or otherwise, at the end of the independence rainbow, but there is a toolbox. And that is the most important point'* (Wilson, 2013a)**.** These arguments focused on two elements – the ability of an independent Scottish Government to pursue policies which would make Scotland more equal and more prosperous, and the democratic argument, ensuring Scotland gets the government it voted for.

Yes Scotland campaign poster on child poverty and independence – stressing the opportunity that independence provides to address socioeconomic challenges.

The SNP argued UK-wide economic policy has prevented Scotland from pursuing policies which would address its distinct needs. This economic argument stressed the inability of the Scottish Government to mitigate the impact of Westminster policy decisions. One of the most resonant images of the campaign (see inset) stressed the necessity of independence in order to combat child poverty (Yes Scotland, 2014). Independence, according to the SNP, would enable the pursuit of progressive policies reflecting the needs of Scotland.

In addition to the socioeconomic rationale for independence, democratic arguments were employed, namely the ability to ensure Scotland gets the government it votes for. In the white paper, this democratic deficit was elaborated, noting the number of years in which Scotland was ruled by a UK government which lacked a majority in Scotland and this was a recurrent theme in speeches by party leaders (Sturgeon, 2013a). The First Minister described the situation in a 2013 interview with Russia Today:

> *'I am 58 years old, and for two thirds of my life Scotland hasn't had the governments we vote for. For two thirds of my entire lifetime, Scotland has voted in one direction, England has voted in a different direction. And because England is so much larger than Scotland, we end up with a government in Westminster, which isn't chosen by the Scottish people. The first argument is essentially a democratic one – that nations and Scotland is a nation have the right of self-determination'*
>
> Salmond, 2013.

This was the result of the '*arithmetic of the United Kingdom parliament which renders Scotland subordinate*' (Salmond, 2011c).

The referendum itself was portrayed as an opportunity to renew Scottish democracy, a '*fundamental democratic choice*' resulting in '*the power to choose who we should be governed by and the power to build a country that reflects our priorities as a society and our values as a people*' (ScotGov, 2013). By voting for independence, voters would be choosing to abandon the '*outdated and profoundly undemocratic Westminster system'* which had failed to adequately reflect Scottish values for one based on the preferences of the people (Salmond, 2013a).

7.1.2 Self-government in Europe and the world

The SNP's framing of its self-government goal has historically been made with reference to the international dimension, a natural result of its focus on external self-government rather than accommodation within the existing state. This was particularly true in the 2014 debate in which questions and claims about Scotland's role in the international community, and particularly, in the European Union came to the fore. The party throughout the campaign insisted an independent Scotland would remain a member of the European Union, a knowledge claim contested by political rivals (Douglas-Scott, 2016). The party's framing of the international context took two main forms: (1) a focus on independence as allowing for integration rather than isolation, reflecting the realities of interdependence in the contemporary era; (2) the opportunity for Scotland to play a

positive role in the world, which is both implicitly and explicitly contrasted with the role played by the United Kingdom. Both of these frames are found in earlier time periods but are more pronounced in the context of the 2014 campaign.

1. Integration, interdependence, and independence

The SNP rejects efforts by Unionist parties to suggest independence equates to separation and isolation within the world, countering this by acknowledging the realities of interdependence. Independence was paired with interdependence in this frame as the party reiterated that it was not ignorant of the realities of a globalised world. It acknowledged the myth of absolute sovereignty but sought to play its rightful role (Salmond, 2013b).

According to the SNP, independence is an outward-looking act which will redress centuries of isolation of Scotland imposed on Scotland by the current state structure. Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, addressed this directly, saying, '*I want to stress that independence is not separation. Independence will mean strong, new relationships between Scotland and the rest of the UK and with other members of the European Union'* (Hyslop, 2013). Not only will independence allow for a more positive relationship with the international community but with the rest of the United Kingdom, addressed in section three. Andrew Wilson's 2013 Arthur Donaldson lecture discussed the constraints of independence but argued it was better than the status quo.

> *'We truly will have the best of both worlds: the most modern nation and closest partnership in the world but with the tools of a normal country to carve our own destiny and make our own choices, albeit constrained by the realities 193 other countries face every day'*
>
> Wilson, 2013a.

Globalisation and the challenges posed by an increasingly interdependent world is both a motivating factor for self-government and for integration within global structures. In the introduction to *Scotland's Future*, these were acknowledged but it was argued self-government would provide the tools to respond to these challenges, contributing to global and European solutions (ScotGov, 2013). *'In the conduct of international affairs no country operates in isolation. The global and regional context creates the conditions and defines the range of choices and options that each state must address*' (ScotGov, 2013). The party and its supporters acknowledged that ultimate sovereignty was a myth and must be shared, *'In reality, of course,*

all countries must cede and share sovereignty and power with others if they are to pursue the best interests of their people' (Wilson, 2013b). But this sharing of sovereignty, according to the SNP, would strengthen Scotland's place in the world. Salmond recognised this in a 2013 conference speech that '*no-one in this party claims that an independent Scotland will be able to wish away global competition. We will still be affected by it, influenced by it and often challenged by it*' but he argued that self-government provided an opportunity to address challenges directly (Salmond, 2013c)

This framing represented an effort by the SNP to counter critiques made by political rivals that independence would leave Scotland cut off from the world. Instead, it argued that meanings of independence and sovereignty had changed and independence was necessary to cope with these challenges.

2. Scotland as a positive actor in the world

The second frame employed by the SNP positioned Scotland as a positive actor on the global stage, in implicit, and sometimes explicit contrast to the role played by the United Kingdom. While references were made to broader international tendencies, specifically engagement in the Iraq War, it focused its attention on the European Union and what it argued were different viewpoints and attitudes between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, particularly in regards to European Union membership.

Scotland was defined as a European nation, '*Our culture, history, trade and international alliances have long been defined by relations with our Continental neighbours*' (SNP, 2014). It juxtaposed little England and pro-European Scotland, a narrative which first emerged in the 1980s. An independent Scotland would be enthusiastic about participation in EU and would be *'free from the visceral distrust of Europe which stifles political engagement at a UK level*' (Salmond, 2013b). In Brussels, Nicola Sturgeon appealed to the members of the European Union to recognise that Scotland's approach to Europe differed from that of the UK. She noted differences in public opinion and described David Cameron's efforts at reform as running the risk of '*sleepwalking towards the exit*' (Sturgeon, 2013b).

At the same time, the SNP did not fully embrace the European project, a response to crises and challenges that had emerged at the European level since its independence in Europe platform was first articulated. In *Scotland's Future*, the party's approach to Europe can be characterised as positive but maintaining a degree of distance, seeking to preserve

some ties with the United Kingdom and to opt out of EU policies understood as detrimental to Scottish interests (ScotGov, 2013). While in the early 2000s the SNP proposed integration within the Eurozone, it now proposed a sterling currency union. The SNP's 2014 European Parliament manifesto described the party as '*unashamedly, though not uncritically, pro-European*' (SNP, 2014). However, despite criticisms the party's approach was to be different to that of the UK parties, building the case for reform through '*constructive dialogue and alliance building*' rather than threats of exit (Sturgeon, 2013b).

The salience of the international, and in particular, the European context, in the SNP's framing of self-government was high, a natural outcome of the party's commitment to external self-government in the form of political independence as well as the prospect of a UK referendum on Europe. Beasley and Kaarbo (2017) describe the behaviour of Scotland and the response of the international community as the '*pre-socialisation*' of what they call an '*aspirant state*'. It involved both an assertion of Scottish sovereignty and an attempt to position Scotland as an aspirant state which would play a positive role on the global stage. This was both implicitly and explicitly contrasted with the role played by the United Kingdom, particularly at the European level, suggesting fundamental differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK.

7.1.3 Self-government, the British state, and state reform

The message of difference, seen in the SNP's approach to self-government and the international context, was also present in discussions of the state and further state reform, and the party continually stressed these in an effort to justify its pursuit of self-government. At the same time, it sought to recast the relationship between the United Kingdom and an independent Scotland, focusing on the positive potential. The framing of the British state structure vis-à-vis Scotland and Scottish self-government took four main forms. Firstly, the British state was framed as an outdated institution, failing to serve Scotland's interests. Secondly, at times, the British state, or more commonly Westminster, was viewed as hostile to Scotland's prosperity and well-being, a frame which became more pronounced in response to the politics of austerity pursued by the UK government. Thirdly, proposals for state reform falling short of full political independence were welcomed, but ultimately considered insufficient. Finally, and in apparent contradiction to the negative framing of the UK state, the SNP developed its vision of maintaining relationships with the rest of the UK.

1. The British state as an outdated institution

The United Kingdom is portrayed as outdated, unable to cope with a changing world, and its changing, and diminished role in it, as well as unable to serve Scottish interests. Nicola Sturgeon described the United Kingdom as a '*deeply indebted state*', one '*adrift from Europe and increasingly isolated on the wider stage*' (Sturgeon, 2013a). She noted a country '*facing joblessness, bankruptcy, falling living standards, a sense of uncertainty about the future*' (ibid). In a 2014 debate published in *The Independent* between Alex Massie and former MSP Andrew Wilson, Wilson described the Union as having fulfilled its function and overdue for replacement. He wrote '*my appeal to you is not out of a disrespect for the story of the UK or Britain. That was a joint project that delivered much for many. But I feel it has run its course*' (cited in Paterson, 2015). While the UK is rarely described as intentionally anti-Scottish, it is portrayed as unable, by virtue of its structure, to adequately represent Scotland's interest. '*It's not just that a government in London is unwilling to do what is best for Scotland. It is incapable of putting the people of Scotland first' (*Salmond, 2012). This framing of the British State was used to justify the SNP's pursuit of self-government, with no interim accommodation possible.

2. Divergence between the UK and Scotland

The framing of the UK as outdated was closely linked with a framing of difference between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. The SNP argued Scots vote for different parties, subscribe to different values, and should be able to pursue these values through self-government. Events like the Iraq War, the handling of the economic crisis and subsequent policies of austerity were used to highlight this. Importantly, the party did not suggest these differences existed between Scotland and England but between Scotland and the central institutions of the British State. It focuses on '*Westminster*', '*London parties*' and the '*UK government*' rather than the United Kingdom or England.

This framing was always present in the SNP's manifestos but found further support with the return of the Conservative Party to government. The party described a choice between a fair and prosperous Scotland and a Britain ravaged by austerity. Alex Salmond's 2013 conference speech described a government '*hell bent on pulling our society apart at the seams'* (Salmond, 2013c). The party focused on UK government policies which wouldin its viewnever have been passed in an independent Scotland, including the bedroom tax and the renewal of Trident (Salmond, 2013d). '*With each passing day it becomes clearer that the Westminster system is not fit for any purpose – it is further away than ever from Scotland's values, and*

past its time' (Salmond, 2013c). The failure of Westminster – to pursue social justice, to implement appropriate policies, and to adequately represent Scotland's interests - was seen as a justification for independence, as only independence would allow for different choices to be made.

3. Devolution as a journey with a final destination

As a result of these fundamental differences, proposals for constitutional change which fell short of independence were met with scepticism by the SNP. However, devolution was quickly embraced by the party in 1999 and throughout the referendum campaign, it was portrayed as a necessary stop on the journey to Scotland's ultimate destination. In a 2012 speech at Strathclyde University, Nicola Sturgeon described the Scotland Act 1998 in glowing terms, saying it '*may come to be seen as one of the finest pieces of legislation ever. It set up a parliament which was fit for the 21st century. We have in place a great foundation – it was designed to be built on*' (Sturgeon, 2013a). In a speech for *The Times* debate, Alex Salmond linked '*a successful, efficient, confident Scottish Parliament*' with growing support for independence (Salmond, 2012b). The Scottish Government white paper portrayed devolution positively, allowing the people of Scotland to experience some of the benefits of self-government but ultimately, illustrating the need for more. '*Progress under devolution has shown us what is possible, but it is not enough*' (ScotGov, 2013). Speaking of the opportunity to revitalise relationships through independence, Sturgeon portrayed independence as a natural next step, consistent with the process of devolution, a '*logical continuation of the devolution journey*' rather than a radical act. (Sturgeon, 2013c).

Despite this adoption of devolution into the narrative of the party, further devolution was, throughout the campaign period, considered unfeasible and the White Paper stated, unlikely. '*Despite much talk of further devolution and more powers for Scotland, with a No vote there is no assurance that there will be any new powers for the Scottish Parliament within the UK*', citing the absence of concrete proposals (ScotGov, 2013). The White Paper also noted that '*Westminster would also maintain its claim of sovereignty over Scotland in all matters*', warning while convention suggests otherwise, Westminster could change the powers or abolish the Scottish Parliament. Only a vote for independence, the party stressed, would guarantee change.

In response to the Vow made by unionist party leaders on the 16th of September, Alex Salmond called the proposal a '*last minute desperate offer of nothing*' (Johnson, 2014). A statement from Yes Scotland attributed the offer further powers to panic amongst Better Together, saying '*It's clear that project panic is willing to say anything in the last few days of the campaign to try to halt the Yes momentum - anything except what new powers, if any, they might be willing to offer*' (Yes Scotland, 2014).

4. A renewed partnership

Despite consistently negative framing of the Union – as either outdated or explicitly hostile to Scottish interests and a rejection of proposals to strengthen Scotland within the Union – the SNP continued to stress that ties between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom would survive and would even be strengthened post-independence, recasting the relationship to one of equality. Its proposals emphasised continuity, through the maintenance of social, currency, and monarchical unions and opportunities to maintain ties and restore relationships which had been hindered by the inequalities of the UK state structure.

For the SNP, independence was an opportunity to renew and reinvigorate partnerships within the United Kingdom and the broader British Isles, cooperating when desired and acting as equal partners. Strategically, this de-radicalised the idea of independence, stressing what would remain the same rather than what would change. In the 2011 manifesto, it proposed replacing the current political union with a social union and foresaw cooperation under the umbrella of the European Union, which allowed for open borders, trade, and cooperation (SNP, 2011). Salmond emphasised these ties in the preface to the White Paper:

> *'I also believe that the bonds of family, friendship, history and culture between Scotland and the other parts of the British Isles are precious. England, Wales and Northern Ireland will always be our family, friends and closest neighbours. But with Scotland as an independent country, our relationship will be one of equals. I have no doubt that it will flourish'*
>
> ScotGov, 2013.

Stephen Noon of Yes Scotland redefined independence as co-operative independence, with '*new united kingdoms*' (Noon, 2013). Independence was an opportunity to reset and foster new, more positive relationships, with the rest of the UK and within the British

Isles. Salmond described the social union, which he argued would be strengthened rather than undermined by Scottish independence.

> *'The social union unites all the peoples of these islands. After independence we will still watch the X-Factor or EastEnders. People in England will still cheer Andy Murray, and people in Scotland will still support the Lions at rugby – even when there aren't many Scots in the team! People will still change jobs and move from Dundee to Dublin, or from Manchester to Glasgow. That's the reality of the social union – it's not about border controls or whatever else is the Whitehall scare of the day'*
>
> Salmond, 2013d.

This may have served a strategic purpose. Continued institutional, economic, cultural and political ties to the rest of the UK may make independence more palatable to undecided voters.

While this framing of the state structure, including the relationship with Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom both today and in an independence scenario, seemed quite novel, it was consistent, albeit in a more pronounced form, with previous visions of independence. The party had always stressed continued relationship and cooperation between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, as discussed in chapter five. However, the degree of integration was more pronounced, informed by pragmatic considerations and constraints imposed by the larger context – the global financial crisis and concerns about the sustainability of the European project, as well as strategic concerns about whether voters would accept radical change.

7.1.4 The independence debate and the party politics

Linked with the SNP's framing of the structure of the British state and self-government was its framing of the party system, which focused on issues of representation and democracy. Paterson (2015) notes the SNP was challenged by a consensus within the Scottish party system, even among unionist campaigners, on the recognition of Scottish sovereignty, leaving the debate focused on the question of whether a sovereign Scotland should have sovereign institutions. As a result, the SNP would struggle to credibly portray its competitors as anti-Scottish but challenged them on their ability to represent Scotland, due to their tendency to '*do Scotland down'*.

The Better Together campaign was understood as an unholy alliance between Labour, Conservatives, and the Liberal Democrats. In his 2012 conference speech, Alex Salmond described the campaign with incredulity, '*Just think of it. Labour, the party which brought the country to its financial knees, unites with the Tories, the party of omnishambles, to tell Scotland that we are uniquely incapable as a nation*' (Salmond, 2012b).

The failure of these parties to adequately serve Scotland and instances in which Scotland failed to get the government it voted for, served as justification for self-government, and this argument was closely linked with discussions of the state.

1. Doing Scotland down

Although the referendum was not an electoral contest, the SNP consistently portrayed unionist parties as failing to speak for Scotland and in fact, undermining its potential. Hearn's analysis of the campaign identified the SNP's tactic as contrasting '*courage versus cowardice'*, arguing Unionist parties were too '*feart*' to do what was right for Scotland (Hearn, 2014).

Alex Salmond engaged with this frame directly throughout the campaign, making repeated reference to what he perceived as an inherent tendency to undermine Scotland. Alex Salmond's October 2011 conference speech spoke of unionist parties as leaderless and out of touch, focusing on '*doing down*' Scotland rather than building her up, a common refrain (Salmond, 2011b). It was not just opposition to the SNP and what it stood for but opposition to Scotland as a nation, '*This is Westminster's agenda of disrespect – not of disrespect to the SNP but of fundamental disrespect for Scotland'* (Salmond, 2011b). In assessing the unionist position, Salmond described opposition to independence as rooted in the fact that '*an independent Scotland would be run by the people of Scotland, for the people of Scotland. Instead of telling people in Scotland what they can do, they tell us what we can't do'* (Salmond, 2011b). He returned to this frame in a 2013 interview with *Holyrood Magazine*, critiquing the no campaign's strategy, saying '*I don't think you can win a referendum by telling the Scottish people that they are not good enough, rich enough, confident enough to be an independent country'* (Rhodes, 2013). The Unionist campaign, according to the SNP, relied on a negative view of Scotland, and offered no positive solutions. '*Without a clear statement of what Scotland might look like in future within the union, the case against independence is inevitably based more on a negative view of Scotland's potential than a positive vision of the future'* (Salmond, 2012b).

The party also drew on historical opposition to devolution to emphasise independence as the natural next step. '*Every old discredited jalopy of an argument from the 1970s and – as we have just heard – the 1990s - is being wheeled out of the garage*' (Salmond, 2012b). Stale arguments were revisited, ones that were relevant in the two previous devolution debates, and subsequently disproven. Nicola Sturgeon employed the same frame, '*Because devolution wasn't the status quo, it was easy to characterise it as a leap in the dark - to spread and create uncertainty. Just as the No campaign is seeking to do today about independence*' (Sturgeon, 2013c). The success of devolution, it was implied, would be followed by a successful independence.

7.1.5 Analysing independence in 2014

The SNP's framing of its self-government goal – of independence – was broadly consistent in 2014 with previous iterations from devolution onwards, but with some key changes in the detail, reflecting economic, European, and strategic considerations. The most significant variation is evident in the details of the goal itself, rather than its framing, with the SNP emphasising, in the details of independence, a greater degree of interdependence. This was not entirely new. In 2004, Kenny MacAskill suggested an independent Scotland should maintain some shared services and cooperate on a range of issue and these proposals were included in the 2013 White Paper (MacAskill, 2004; ScotGov, 2013).

The SNP made a pragmatic case for self-government, arguing independence was not to fulfil a romantic ideal but was a tool, one which would allow for Scotland to become more equitable, prosperous, and democratic. What was striking both to voters and political commentators was the emphasis on what would remain the same in the event of a yes vote. Rather than framing independence as a radical departure from what came before, the party stressed continuity, with independence as a natural next step, a scenario in which many of the same policies and institutions would remain in place. This ensured stability and would, the party assumed, reassure voters who supported further devolution.

It also reflected broader international and European dynamics. Since the 1980s the SNP's independence in Europe platform stressed deeper European integration, including in social policy and currency, presuming that the United Kingdom would also engage more fully with the European project. Crisis at the European level and the refusal of the UK government to enter into such an arrangement required a rethink of the party's support

of the Euro (Brown Swan & Petersohn, 2017). Beyond these details, the SNP's framing of the international context and self-government seemed to shift from independence in Europe to a solution to some of the challenges posed to a small state, to a form of independence embedded within the context of the British Isles. European Union membership was layered on top of this, serving as an umbrella which would facilitate cooperation with Europe and the rest of the UK.

This focus on continued cooperation and close ties with the rest of the United Kingdom is perhaps surprising given the quite negative framing of the British state and its institutions, which is at best neglectful, at worst, openly hostile to Scotland's interests. However, it is explained by an emphasis on the party system and the structure of the state. It isn't that Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom are enemies, it is the fact that Scotland's needs and interests cannot be accommodated within the existing stare structures. The focus is on the unionist parties and their actions as a justification for Scottish self-government rather than an intrinsic animosity between Scotland and England.

The SNP's framing was, at points, challenged from within and outwith the party. The party's proposals, which to a large degree emphasised what would remain the same with independence rather than what would change, were critiqued internally as well as by Yes Scotland coalition partners as being overly cautious. In a referendum post-mortem, former party leader Gordon Wilson argued that to win a future referendum, the movement must go on the offensive (Wilson, 2015).

As the party moves forward, reflecting on the unsuccessful referendum of 2014, shifts in Scottish and UK-wide party politics, and the process of Brexit, these frames are likely to be modified, reflecting new dynamics at the European, state, and party system level.

7.2 The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie and confederalism

The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie's rapid rise to systemic relevance accorded the party influence, both from its blackmail and coalition potential (Abts et al, 2012). The 2010 federal elections were a victory for the N-VA but also for the Walloon Parti Socialiste and these voting patterns helped highlight growing divergence between the North and South (Abts et al, 2012). They also cemented the party's leadership among Flemish parties, who

appeared increasingly willing to follow the N-VA's lead on state reform for fear of ceding further votes (De Winter, 2012: 18; André and Depauw, 2015: 229). Its victory in the 2012 elections, particularly its success in Antwerp, allowed the party to stress that progress was inevitable (Dandoy, 2013).

The N-VA withdrew from government negotiations in 2007 and 2011 and was aware, at the federal and regional elections of 2014, of the risk of being seen as obstructionist, characterised, along with the Vlaams Belang, as a party of permanent opposition. Bart de Wever declared 2013 the year of confederalism, stating he and his colleagues would spend the year preparing its confederal goals in advance of the 2014 election. His 2014 congress speech suggested this was not only a manifesto for the coming term but for the future of Flanders. '*These texts will determine the political action of our party in the coming years*' (de Wever, 2014a). He continued, '*We have often written history together. Today we have written the future. The future of our country*' (de Wever, 2014a).

Success at the polls would not set a process of state reform in motion as it would in Scotland but would require government formation and negotiation. The party's goal, announced prior to the election, was 30% of the Flemish vote, a significant percentage in the highly fragmented Belgian party system and one that would make a federal coalition without the N-VA numerically impossible rendering the party incontournable (André and Depauw, 2015: 230). It stressed its office-holding ambitions, with an introductory letter from Ben Weyts calling the party to have courage:

> *'Courage to govern without parties that stand in the way of structural reforms. Courage to form a government which would take immediate action on socio-economic recovery, but at the same time, anchors structural change in the future'*
>
> N-VA, 2013: 3.

However, in a 2012 article on the prospects of the N-VA, De Winter argued that it had two '*opposite but equally winning*' strategies available to it, firstly, to enter into negotiations and achieve state reform, or conversely, to enter into protracted negotiations but ultimately withdraw, claiming Francophone intransigence, cementing its role as the party speaking for Flanders (De Winter, 2012: 18).

There was some debate within the N-VA about the primacy of self-government goals and whether, given the urgency of the economic situation, other goals should be pursued (André & Depauw, 2015: 230). Siegfried Bracke caused controversy in August 2013 when he suggested socioeconomic reforms should be the priority in 2014 and argued that the N-VA would enter into coalition with this in mind. Liesbeth Homans, a prominent figure within the party, contradicted him, saying that the party would not enter into coalition without an agreement on state reform. '*No coalition without agreement to the N-VA's terms*' Bracke later retracted this statement, saying socioeconomic goals and state reforms should be pursued simultaneously (Pauli, 2014). The party stressed this commitment throughout the campaign, although ultimately ceding it over the course of the negotiations.

The 2014 elections, taking place at the European, federal, and regional community level were described as the '*mother of all elections*' due to their scale and for their implications for Belgium's future. For the N-VA, this represented an opportunity to capitalise on recent successes and growingdisillusionment with the status quo in order to enter into government at both levels and pursue self-government and socioeconomic policies.

The N-VA proposals, published in autumn 2013 and approved at the party's January 2014 congress, represent the most explicit articulation of its self-government goals to date. These goals consisted of four main components, each of which will be addressed in turn. Firstly, it defined and justified confederalism, rejecting academic definitions in favour of ones in keeping with the goals of the party and to some degree, the traditions of the Belgian state. Secondly, it situated confederalism in an international context, focusing exclusively on the European dimension, which is consistent with previous iterations. Thirdly, the party stressed self-government as a response to the state system which had failed to serve both Flemings and Francophones. Finally, it placed itself and its goals in the larger context of the party system, questioning the ability of Flemish rivals to adequately represent Flemish interests and pledging to demonstrate courage and responsibility in its pursuit of office.

7.2.1 Defining and contextualizing self-government

The confederal model proposed by the N-VA in 2014 was consistent with that advanced by the N-VA since 2009, but included substantially more detail. Confederalism, according to the party, differs from the current federal arrangement in the sense that the federal

logic was reversed, with Flanders and Wallonia as the main actors, '*own[ing] all powers*' and exercising them independently or together when in their mutual interest. The ethos of a Belgian confederation would see each acting *'according to their own views, their own responsibility, and with their own funds*' (N-VA, 2013: 21). In his speech at the 2014 congress, Vice President Ben Weyts described confederalism by its purpose '*In order to address our own problems with our own solutions and our own money*' (Weyts, 2014a). He acknowledged this was not the '*expensive academic, professorial definition*' but a practical solution to the considerable problems of the Belgian state (Weyts, 2014a).

Rather than proposing yet another round of state reform, it proposed a *Treaty of Confederation* between Flanders and Wallonia, a text which would include the basic rules and functions of the confederal institutions, a summary of rights and freedoms applicable to all residents, and a list of powers exercised jointly (N-VA, 2013: 69). The institutions of the Belgian confederation would be modelled on the European Union and a governing council would be charged with ensuring cooperation, resolving conflict, preparing the confederation's international position, and holding consultations on Brussels. The party did not claim sovereignty, although the hollowed Belgian state was to act as a '*glove for Flanders*' and Wallonia, with little right of initiative (N-VA, 2007; 2010).

The proposed Belgian confederation would consist of two deelstaten: Flanders and Wallonia, with a special status for both the Brussels Capital and the German-speaking region (N-VA, 2013: 21). Brussels as a capital would fall within the territories of both Flanders and Wallonia, and the city would remain the capital of Flanders. (N-VA, 2013). This was consistent with the long-held preference of the N-VA and the Volksunie for a two-state model of bilateral federalism, avoiding according full status to Brussels, which was considered an unjust counterbalance to a Flemish democratic majority.

For the N-VA, the relationship between confederalism and independence is ambiguous. The original conference text did not mention Flemish independence, and it has been excluded in recent election manifestos. However, this was a subject of debate for party members at the 2014 party congress, leading to the insertion of a discussion of independence in the final draft of the party proposals. Flemish Parliamentarian Matthias Dipendaele stressed that '*An independent Flanders remains well and truly the first objective in the statutes of the party*'. This was also reiterated on the party's website, responding to questions

about its goals '*Our final goal is, in effect, an independent Flanders and membership in Europe*' (N-VA, 2014).

However, the party stressed this process was made up in steps, a long-term goal rather than something to be pursued in the context of the current campaign. It described this as a strategic choice, with Ben Weyts noting the party's commitment to independence but an absence of public support (Weyts, 2014). Independence is thus portrayed in two ways - firstly, as a natural outcome of confederalism, with the Belgian centre gradually reduced in importance, and secondly, as an alternative to Francophone resistance to proposed reforms. The timeline is vague and independence is not an urgent demand. Jan Jambon explained this timeline in personal terms, '*I'm 60 at the moment and I'm not quite sure whether I will have the possibility to have a little party on independence*' (Jambon, 2014). But he noted the pace of change would be set by Francophones and Flemish mainstream parties, with intransigence on their part leading to acceleration.

1. Confederalism as a tool

Perhaps even more than its Scottish counterpart, the N-VA focused on confederalism as a tool to enable policy – both economic improvements and democratic ones - rather than on the basis of principle. Weyts described the purpose of Flemish nationalism and self-government, explaining '*it's about proving that it's not about just a nationalist struggle. It's about what I call the de-instrumentalization of nationalism. Meaning that it's about socioeconomic reforms*' (Weyts, 2014b). This emphasis was strategic and many within the party acknowledged that they possessedan emotional attachment to the idea of an independent Flanders, the voting population needed to be persuaded by the opportunity for meaningful social and economic gains (Jambon, 2014). The goal for the party, explained a prominent N-VA MP was '*health and wealth for our region and our people*' rather than institutional structures (Jambon, 2014).

In an introductory letter from congress president Ben Weyts, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie's rationale for seeking confederalism was outlined. This was rooted in a critique of the current system and its failure to deliver socioeconomic returns rather than a historical or value rational argument.

> *'We pay skyrocketing federal taxes, but don't receive efficient services in return. We pay enormous social contributions, and yet our social security is neither social nor*

> *secure. Our businesses and entrepreneurs pay through the nose, but they don't receive a favourable economic and investment climate'*
>
> N-VA, 2013: 3.

The N-VA's congress text was heavily policy focused; in total, 438 specific policy proposals were made in areas including defence, social security, pensions, the European Union, economic development, Brussels, and foreign affairs (N-VA, 2013). The move to a confederal model would allow for the implementation of urgent social and economic reforms (N-VA, 2013: 76). It would also allow both communities to get the policies they vote for.

The specific policy proposals reflect the party's centre right orientation, emphasising entrepreneurship, low taxes and spending cuts, and a strict approach to immigration and integration (N-VA, 2013). The current systems of solidarity transfers is subject to particular scrutiny as a symptom of Belgian dysfunction, and is consistent with Jamin's (2011) analysis of a producerist narrative in Flanders which juxtaposes hardworking Flanders with a dependent Wallonia. Flemings are described as committed to some degree of solidarity but the annual transfer is '*no longer reasonable*' (N-VA, 2013: 67). Under the proposed confederal model, solidarity would be regulated by the constituent units, providing for a fixed term mechanism throughout the transition from federalism to confederalism.

Describing the process of constitutional reform, the N-VA rebukes participants for having failed to recognise the democratic majority of Flemings, whose preferences have been suppressed by special majority laws, alarm bell procedures, and the process of government formation. These procedures are understood to have given *'4 million Francophones a de facto veto which they use to politically side-line 6.5 million Flemings*' (N-VA, 2013: 18). In an interview in *Knack*, shortly after joining the party, long-time activist of the Flemish movement Peter de Roover offers a more nuanced analysis,

> *'Belgium is the sum of two democracies and therefore there is no direct translation of electoral results into policy. Not in Flanders, not in Wallonia. It is sometimes said that Francophones lead this country, but that is not true. Those who defend the status quo are in control. And they are often the Francophones'*
>
> Demeulemeester & Zuallaert, 2014.

Confederalism was to represent an alternative to this democratic deficit, dividing key competences so socioeconomic policies could be pursued which aligned with the ideological tendencies of the population and, crucially, ensuring each is responsible for their own spending. '*Confederalism gives the Flemings the long-term policies that they vote for. Flemings and Francophones can take their destiny into their own hands*' (N-VA, 2013: 3). When cooperation is required, it would be entered into freely. '*Forced cooperation is replaced by voluntary cooperation*' (N-VA, 2013: 68). It would also improve the efficiency and efficacy of government.

Together, these proposals linked the pursuit of centre-right policies – of low public spending, personal responsibility, and efficient government with the pursuit of self-government which was an important component of explaining the party's meteoric success. Beyens et al (2015) document a shift in its profile, with the N-VA's electorate remaining committed to more authority for Flanders but also moving further to the right ideologically between 2003 and 2009 and their 2014 proposals reflect these preferences.

7.2.2 Self-government and the European Union

The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie's 2014 self-government goals were to be achieved within the structure of the Belgian state, in contrast to the SNP's external goals. Despite this, the N-VA made extensive reference to Europe, which it argued provided a supporting structure for Flemish self-government, as well as a model, both positive and negative for Belgium. Its engagement with the broader international context was more limited and it proposed European solutions for larger problems around security, asylum, and defence rather than direct participation in international structures.

Although it acknowledged that only states are recognised as members, this does not, in its view, exclude Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels and the German-speaking region from participation in the decision-making process, drawing on the existing principle of '*In foro interno, in foro externo*' which allows the regions and communities input (N-VA, 2013: 83). In a confederalist scenario, the constituent units would participate in the coordination process, led by the Belgian Council of Ministers. Specific issue areas would be divided between the two, and both would be present in meetings. The confederal state would take the form of a '*letterbox*' in which stability and reform programmes and action plans would be deposited with the confederal state for transfer to the relevant European authority.

Europe would then in turn deal directly with Flanders and Wallonia (N-VA, 2013: 83). Legally, the proposed structure of the Belgian state represents the minimum definition of statehood required for European Union membership.

The N-VA's framing of the international dimension in relation to its self-government goals took three key forms: (1) positioning Flanders as a European nation and Europe as a force which would enable self-government; (2) acknowledging interdependence as a modern condition; (3) discussing the challenges facing Europe, often linking them with the challenges facing Belgium.

1. Flanders as a European nation

In its 2013 proposal, the N-VA continually stressed the European identity of Flanders, which was compatible and complimentary to a strong Flemish identity. Flemings were described as '*European Flemings*' and '*world citizens*', seeking to be '*self-confident, open, and inclusive to the outside*' (N-VA, 2013: 15). The party asserts that '*The future of 6.5 million Flemings is in Europe*' (N-VA, 2013: 80). Confederalism would therefore allow for full participation in the European project, currently limited by the structure of the Belgian state, playing a positive and constructive role. This stress on European identity was used to position the N-VA in the political mainstream, and draw a distinction between the more closed identity proposed by the Vlaams Belang. However, European identities are not politicised in Flanders to the same degree as they are in the United Kingdom, and European identity was rarely employed as a marker of difference within Belgium, as it was in the Scottish case.

2. The interdependence of self-government

The party recognised interdependence and global challenges but argued self-government would allow Flanders, in cooperation with Europe, to address them. It acknowledged the realities of globalisation, saying '*We live in a small country with a big abroad, developments in the world effect Flanders. The more globalization progresses, the bigger the impact*' (N-VA, 2013: 81). Like the SNP, this served as a justification for self-government rather than a weakness, as Flanders needed to find its own place and contribute to European responses. Developments at the European level were to enable self-government, as it '*provides us solutions which we should not have without the European Union*' (Bracke, 2014). In an interdependent and an increasingly interconnected world, Belgium was not an appropriate level, simultaneously too big to serve Flanders and too small to tackle the world's

problems. Despite criticisms of Europe, it remained central to the party's goals, with no prospect of strengthening the Belgian state. Voters were asked '*Who wants to return to the Belgian franc, long queues at border crossings or complicated paperwork for the import or export of products?*' (N-VA, 2014).

While the party proposed strong integration within Europe, it was not entirely uncritical of what it perceived as counterproductive developments at the European level. The party's original draft of the congress text suggested a degree of what the N-VA describes as '*Eurorealism*' but this was ultimately removed because of fears that it might be interpreted as Euroscepticism. Although the party proposed further transfer of powers towards Europe, the identity and sovereignty of the individual member states remained central and this frame of Eurorealism, while fully present in the party's 2014 campaign became more salient following the elections. These objections were rooted in a perception that the European project had structural problems, symbolised by recent crises, which undermined its potential.

3. The challenges of Europe and Belgium

For the N-VA, the crisis at European level was the crisis of the Belgian state writ large, a frame it had employed in the past. '*The European Union is more and more like an XL Belgium*' as a result of divisions between the north and south (N-VA, 2013: 80). While the Volksunie once proposed Belgium as a model of peaceful coexistence for a nascent Europe, the N-VA employed Belgium as a cautionary tale. Divisions in performance and attitudes between the North and South, both within Belgium and the EU, were at the root of this problem. In a 2012 feast day speech, Bart de Wever stressed the importance of these issues noting '*there is growing awareness that the European Union is becoming like Belgium*', referencing growing German opposition to Southern transfers to countries who failed to implement necessary socio-economic reforms (de Wever, 2012) This frame re-emerged in the context of the 2014 campaign, with the party calling for subsidiarity and accountability, not a Belgium XL (N-VA, 2013: 81). This frame was also captured in interviews, with leaders noting '*The European Union is, in a way, Belgium XL, and that's the negative way of comparing the two*' and raising concerns over whether the European Union could adequately support Flemish ambitions of self-government (Bracke, 2014).

While the N-VA referenced broader international concerns of climate change, migration and security, its international engagement was always filtered through a European lens, seeking European coordination on key challenges. Despite the concerns expressed about the sustainability of the European project, the party continually advocated further development at the European level and at no point questioned the role of Europe in Flanders' future. Whether it advanced an idea of confederalism in the near-term or independence in the future, attention was on self-government within Europe, never outwith it. The party's leader in the Chamber of Representatives said of Flanders' journey towards self-government as '*it will go on until I think independence, but within the European context*' (Bracke, 2014). However, the party encouraged reform of the European Union, allowing for a greater degree of Flemish self-government and the transfer of important Belgian competences upward.

The idea of Flemish self-government outside of the European Union was inconceivable to the N-VA which saw independent statehood as unnecessarily risky in an increasingly interdependent world. This had broader implications for the party's strategic pursuit of its self-government goals, making Flemish independence, still listed as its primary aim, contingent on the ability of the European Union to supplant the Belgian state. The party's decision to enter into government without a firm commitment on confederalism, despite earlier pledges, might be seen in this light.

7.2.3 Self-government and the Belgian state

While the European Union was viewed as source of support for Flemish ambitions for self-government, the Belgian state was considered a negative force, necessitating self-government. This negative framing of the Belgian state was persistent throughout the party's texts and had important implications on its views of the relationship between the state and the Flemish nation, the prospect of further state reform, and relationships between Flanders and the Belgian centre and Walloon counterparts in the event confederalism was achieved.

While the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie proposes the maintenance of the Belgian state, albeit in a dramatically hollowed form, its framing of the Belgian state is highly critical. Three frames are employed by the party: (1) the artificial nature of the Belgian state; (2) the

current state of dysfunction and interaction; and (3) in response to alternative proposals for state reform, as too little, too late for a divided Belgium.

1. Belgium as an artificial state

In interviews with figures within the N-VA, conducted over the course of this research, the history of Belgium was repeatedly referenced, with Belgium described as an artificial unit, lacking the necessary coherence to exist as a nation. This was a consistent frame throughout the party's history but one which Bart de Wever has recently sought to downplay.

This artificiality, according to the party, was a result of both the origins of the Belgian state and its subsequent political development. The party's vice president stressed these differences, focusing on the existence of '*two democracies*', resulting in a '*clash of two different points of view, two different cultures, two different backgrounds*' (Weyts, 2014b). The party's leader in the Chamber of Representative argued these differences manifested in everyday life and within the sphere of politics, '*We do not want any French policies. We don't want Francois Hollande, we want Frau Merkel*' (Bracke, 2014). In an open letter to King Phillipe, published by Theo Francken, member of the Chamber of Representatives described the Belgian state and people, echoing Jules Destrée's statement '*Sire, there are no Belgians*'. Warning the king of challenges to come, and making a statement against monarchical intervention in politics, Francken said:

> *'You will stand at the head of a state called Belgium, where two nations live side by side: Flanders and Francophone Belgium. Each with their own political parties, their own media, their own language, music, culture, and their own humour. Do not assume that you can bring any change therein'*
>
> Francken, 2013.

This absence of a demos, with shared values, interests, and a shared language, had negative implications for Belgium's future and served as a justification for self-government. This framing was consistent from the party's early years, discussed in chapter five.

2. Belgian dysfunction

Belgium is characterised as a standstill, with questions raised about the legitimacy of the Belgian democracy. It is portrayed as a country in decline, stymied by roadblocks, institutional gridlock and increasingly disconnected from the preferences of the

population on both sides of the institutional divide (N-VA, 2013: 16). The process of constitutional reform had left the government with '*bits and pieces of delegated powers*', with key social and economic levers residing at the federal level, hindering the process of good government (N-VA, 2013: 20). This led to poor outcomes for both Flemings and Francophones.

The Belgian government in particular, which for 25 years had included the Francophone Parti Socialiste, was characterised by its irresponsible economic policy, with a preference for '*more taxes, more debt, and more government spending*' at the expense of a more productive and fiscally responsible Flanders. At the party congress, Ben Weyts spoke of the consensus within the Flemish party system and the failure for these preferences to materialise in meaningful reforms, a product both of the structure of the Belgian state and the complicity of traditional Flemish parties, discussed in the following section (Weyts, 2014). This was consistent with previous characterisations of the Belgian state, as the '*sickman of Europe*', discussed in the previous chapter.

In contrast, confederalism is promoted as a solution, and a means of promoting good government. Confederalism '*creates an orderly democratic structure, with clear responsibilities, makes policy closer to the citizens and gives them greater control over the services and decision-making institutions. It has a more valuable democratic voice*' (N-VA, 2013: 69). This government is '*slim and transparent*', and built on institutions which work effectively (N-VA, 2013: 69). The party's critique of the Belgian state were closely linked with the purposes of self-government, arguing both economic reform and democratic transparency could not be achieved within the current Belgian state structure.

3. State reform - too little, too late

Previous reforms were described by the N-VA as important steps, placing Flanders on a journey towards self-government. However, they were presented as ultimately insufficient, having institutionalised the dysfunctions of the Belgian system. The constant and costly processes of reforms were used to justify more radical self-government. As a result, the N-VA rejected steps proposed by rival parties, including alternative models of confederalism and approached proposals made by rival parties to transfer powers within the existing constitutional framework with scepticism. In a research interview, Ben Weyts described previous rounds as the '*steps of mice*', '*just small reforms but hey, that's Belgium. We do*

make some progress. It's not the progress we need or the Flemish want, it's just the progress we can deliver' (Weyts, 2014b). Peter De Roover, a leader in the broader Flemish Movement who joined the party in advance of the 2014 campaign, summed up the reforms as another costly layer of complexity *'Installing two stoves in a kitchen does not create a nicer meal, but is expensive to install and the gas bill will be higher*' (De Roover, 2013).

The continuous process was considered to be inefficient and undemocratic, with the party noting proponents of the sixth round of state reform went into the process pledging another round. This process of reform resulted in a '*pointless and costly perpetual exercise*' (N-VA, 2013: 20). Previous reforms, while welcome, were also described quite cynically, as processes in which '*Flemings exchanged big bags of money for a further reduction of their democratic majority, a weakened position in Brussels, and a few bits and bobs of powers*' (N-VA, 2013: 21). It also served to weaken ties between the North and the South, encouraging a conflictual relationship (Bracke, 2014).

Confederalism was viewed as a natural remedy, a response to the failures of incremental state reforms to adequately address the needs of both Flemings and Walloons. Although proposing a radical change, the party was careful to speak of it in evolutionary terms. Bart de Wever spoke nostalgically of the first party congress of the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie and situated the party within a larger historical frame which included the Volksunie and its efforts towards federalism. His 2014 congress speech suggested confederal reforms were inevitable,

> *'For any reform that our movement has asked for has come eventually. And the others always said no, they said impossible, never, jamais…until they happened anyways…Because nothing can stop an idea whose time has come. The power of change, the will to progress, will always prevail'*
>
> de Wever, 2014a.

The party asked '*If it was once possible to take these steps, why should we not take further steps and transform?*' (N-VA, 2013: 25). However, a more dramatic reform than the one on offer from rival parties was required. This theme of inevitability was a message to both Flemings, who sought further reforms, and Francophones, who would need to keep pace.

Although presenting a more moderate self-government goal than its Scottish counterparts, the language of partnership and a continued relationship were largely absent

from the N-VA's proposals. When cooperation is required, it would be entered into freely. '*Forced cooperation is replaced by voluntary cooperation*' (N-VA, 2013: 68) but it was not emphasised in these proposals. De Winter's analysis of the party strategy in advance of the 2014 election explains this with reference to the structure of the Belgian state, largely as a result of Brussels. Belgians '*are condemned to stick together…They cannot divorce. They can make hell out of each other's life in this forced marriage. Or they can try to make the best out of it, probably by enhancing their 'living apart together' relationship*' (De Winter, 2012: 29). The historically Flemish, overwhelmingly Francophone city of Brussels was to be jointly administered by Flanders and Wallonia. A party leader argued, off the record, that of not for the '*problem*' of Brussels, the Belgian state would have been dissolved much earlier.

The issue of Brussels can be understood as an explanation for what De Winter describes as a proposal for '*living together apart*'. The party's spokesperson in the Chamber explained

> *'if you compare Belgium to a marriage, the only reason why we're still together is because of the children. And the children, that is, that is, Brussels and also the German speaking region which has always been so much like the special brother'*
>
> Pohlmann, 2014.

The party's publications and many of its representatives stressed the centrality of Brussels, acknowledging Flemish independence, in a traditional sense, was not possible due to an unwillingness to sacrifice Brussels.

Extending the analogy of marriage and divorce, frequently used in analyses of the Belgian state, the confederal structure proposed can be understood as investing in separate bedrooms and dividing finances, rather than undergoing marriage counselling. While the N-VA moderated its language, no longer referring to Walloon counterparts pejoratively as subsidy junkies and dependents, self-government was not, as in the case of the SNP, an opportunity to renew partnerships, but was to serve an exclusively functional purpose.

Throughout the party's congress text and the campaign which followed, the inadequacies of the Belgian state were identified. It was both undemocratic and dysfunctional, a result of compromises which served neither Flemings nor Walloons. As a result, confederalism was proposed as a solution, a means of preserving certain components of the Belgian state necessary for participation in the European Union and the management of Brussels, but largely allowing for autonomy for Flanders and Wallonia. This was a functional argument,

made on the basis of the ability to pursue economic and social policies which aligned with public preferences, rather than an opportunity to renew relationships.

7.2.4 The party politics of self-government

The structure of the Belgian party system, deeply divided along linguistic lines, and with a multitude of mainstream and fringe parties, as well as the nature and process by which state reform would take place, shaped the N-VA's framing of its self-government goals. It advocated for the radical reform of the Belgian state but pursued this goal through traditional channels, the negotiation of a coalition agreement and the formation of a federal government. Unlike its Scottish counterpart, it rejected a direct vote on its goals, arguing this was anathema to the party's ethos as well as processes of Belgian policymaking.

In the Belgian political context, the main driver of further state reform has been the presence and success of nationalist voices in Flanders (Deschouwer, 2013). As a result of the continued relevance of the Volksunie and its successor, all traditional parties have called for further reform beyond the current federal structure, as exemplified in the 1999 resolutions of the Flemish Parliament. (Deschouwer, 2013). A confederal model for Belgium is not exclusive to the N-VA but has been proposed at various points by the Christian Democrats and Liberals (Dandoy et al, 2013).

As a result of a crowded party space and the demands of government formation, the N-VA's framing of the party system and self-government was shaped by two considerations: the need to become *incontournable*, or necessary for the formation of a governing coalition at the centre and the need to be viewed as a responsible, and acceptable partner in coalition, both by the voters themselves and by prospective partners.

The party's messages were aimed at voters and Flemish and Francophone counterparts, and they emphasised both self-government and necessary socioeconomic reforms. This message can be understood to appeal to Flemish voters, who preferred centre-right economic policies, and to warn Francophones, suggesting budgetary cuts and changes in provisions for social services would be the outcome of the N-VA's success. Geert Bourgeois, party founder and then Vice Minister President in the Flemish Government, explained the party's governing objectives, arguing that it would allow the party to place pressure on the Francophones. '*If N-VA becomes incontournable, then the French speakers will*

just have to follow. If in a marriage one partner says 'I want this', and the other says 'no', then it's finished'. (Otte, 2013). The party spokesperson explained this strategy in a research interview, arguing that the strength of the N-VA and the prospects of implementing its socioeconomic policy would motivate state reform '*We believe that if they are confronted with a policy of tax reductions, smaller government and reducing of the debt, their reaction will be to demand devolution themselves*' (Pohlman, 2014).

With this in mind, the party engaged with the Belgian party system through the employ of three key frames. Firstly, it argued that it possessed the courage to govern, even at high political cost to itself, a move to counter charges of obstruction or permanent opposition. Secondly, and closely linked with the frame of courage was that of taking responsibility at all levels. Finally, traditional Flemish political parties were framed as complicit in the system, unable to pursue self-government in a meaningful way.

1. The courage to govern

The N-VA positioned itself as a party of prospective government, seeking office at both the Flemish and federal level in order to pursue socioeconomic and confederal policies. It stressed its democratic credentials, as a means of distinguishing itself from the Vlaams Belang, but also stressed its outsider status, arguing that unlike traditional Flemish parties, the N-VA was wholly committed to state reform (N-VA, 2013). The party had the courage to govern, not for its own interests, but for the pursuit of self-government and for the benefit of Flanders. This was symbolised by two key components: an emphasis on courage and the focus on seeking office, not for themselves, but for their cause. The party repeatedly stressed its courage in the context of the 2014 debate. '*Change requires courage*' was a frequent message (N-VA, 2013: 15). In an introductory letter, Ben Weyts explained the party would act with the:

> *'Courage to govern without parties that stand in the way of structural reforms. Courage to form a government which would take immediate action on socio-economic recovery, but at the same time, anchors structural change in the future'*
>
> N-VA, 2013: 3.

The portrayal of the N-VA and its leadership as courageous was not a new but was employed differently in the run-up to the 2014 election. Its abstention from government in 2007 and 2011 were framed as courageous acts, forsaking the spoils of office in order

to engage in the principled pursuit of policy, as discussed in chapter six. In 2014, with polls suggesting strong results, it was now employing this courage in order to secure its entry into government, even at a cost to itself. Bart de Wever's 2014 congress speech returned to this theme of courage, paraphrasing Martin Luther, '*Here I stand: I cannot do otherwise*' (De Wever, 2014a). This positioned the N-VA as a force which would speak truth to power, countering the forces of the status quo with '*conviction and unwavering courage*' (De Wever, 2014a). De Wever continued in this vein, quoting political opponents labelled the party and its members as dangerous intellectual terrorists. This radical language was cited as evidence of the principles of the N-VA, '*we are indeed heretical, we are indeed dangerous*' (De Wever, 2014a).

The political system was described as under pressure by the N-VA, which argued radical change was necessary. Strong results on the 25th of May would provide the party with a political mandate to enter into office and enact change once there. De Wever immediately returned to the theme of courage in his victory speech, saying Vicit vim virtus, or '*Virtue conquered force. Flemings have chosen change*', pledging to take its place in the coalition (de Wever, 2014b). However, it maintained this outsider ethos, even as it began the government formation process. '*Never before have there been attempts this powerful to put out the Flemish. But the Flemish have cast their vote, and they have voted for change*' (de Wever, 2014b).

2. Taking responsibility

Despite attempts to situate the N-VA as a threat to the status quo, it was direct in its pursuit of participation at the centre. The party was explicitly office-seeking, motivated both by the opportunity presented by increases in political support, and the need to avoid becoming a party of permanent opposition. This represents a change from its position previously, in which abstention was framed as a courageous act, with the party forsaking the spoils of office in favour of principled opposition. Weyts (2014b) explained its office-seeking strategy, which focused on the formation of government at both the Flemish level and the federal level, arguing this was a crucial step, both for the N-VA and for the process of state reform. In 2014, it responded to a question on its website on its status as a party of government or of opposition. It explained its purpose, saying '*The N-VA does not want to continue speaking from the side-lines in the hopes of maintaining its political purity. We are not a perpetual opposition party, but we stand separate from other traditional Belgian parties'.* (N-VA, 2014)

This frame of taking responsibility was employed throughout the campaign. Entry into government at the federal level would mark an important stage for the party, symbolising political maturity and positioning it as a legitimate actor in wider Belgian politics as well as providing the means to pursue its self-government and socioeconomic goals directly.

At the same time, the focus on entry into government was to be in pursuit of principles rather than the spoils of office. '*The exercise of power is not an end in itself for the N-VA, it represents only an instrument that allows us to realize our programme*' in contrast with its traditional rivals (N-VA, 2014). It assigned itself purer motives than those of its political rivals and maintained an outsider ethos, despite its meteoric rise. This became most clear when contrasted with the framing of political rivals, particularly traditional Flemish parties, who are accused of lacking the necessary courage, co-opted by the Belgian state system.

3. The complicity of Flemish rivals

In 2014, the party returned to the frame of complicity of traditional Flemish rivals. The behaviour of traditional Flemish parties, particularly those who had participated in recent governments, is contrasted with the courage of the N-VA. The Christian Democrats in particular, are criticised for their willingness to enter into office without an agreement on significant state reform and the party employs a frame of complicity consistently. '*One time federalist, sometimes confederalist, sometimes federalist ... That is simply because they determine their program through their strategy. Let us define our strategy through our program*' (Weyts, 2014a). Bart de Wever argued in his 2014 conference speech:

> *'Because it goes sometimes with traditional powers, they cling to their power and fight the power of change for as long as they can. It requires conviction and courage not to bend. So here we are, with that conviction and with that daring'*
>
> De Wever, 2014a.

In his speech at the party's 2014 congress Ben Weyts described the consensus on the need for reform within Flemish parties, but claimed despite this consensus, progress had not been made. '*But time after time, the traditional Flemish parties stepped into a federal government which did the exact opposite of what the Flemish voters wanted. And afterwards, they say sorry*' (Weyts, 2014a). He argued in a research interview that they lacked the moral courage, and were easily discouraged by the difficulties of the Belgian system. They say, '*Yeah, it's true. It's very*

hard to govern this country…' and use this as an excuse for their failure to enact meaningful reform (Weyts, 2014b)

The N-VA presented a threat to these parties, warning them of the consequences of their behaviour and their complicity with the Parti Socialiste.

> *'We are dangerous to parties who have come to find it normal that they support a PS government without a majority in Flanders. We are dangerous to politicians who think that it then suffices to apologise for the policies they pursued. We are dangerous to those who think it is not up to the voter but up to them who is allowed in the next government'*
>
> De Wever, 2014a.

The message to Flemish voters was that these parties could no longer be trusted to further Flemish interests - only the N-VA possessed the courage and moral fibre to stand up for Flanders.

The N-VA's self-government goal – the restructuring of the Belgian state along confederal lines – was shaped by the specificities of the Belgian electoral and party system. The party's 2014 proposals represented a starting point for coalition negotiations at the federal level, as well as a benchmark against which traditional Flemish rivals could be evaluated and critiqued. While it did not compete in Wallonia, its campaign message was aimed at both Flemings and Francophones. To Flemings, the party suggested it was the most reliable vehicle to pursue self-government and socioeconomic reform, to Francophones, it called into question the sustainability of the existing social system and encouraged them to consider their own demands.

7.2.5 A distinct vision of confederalism

The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie's 2014 proposals reflected a de-radicalisation from its origins but were consistent with the party's platform since 2007. There was no focus on independence in the near to medium term, although when pressed, it did stress an independent Flanders as a European member state remained the first statute of the party (Diependaele, 2014). This reflected an acknowledgement of public opinion and political preferences in Belgium. In the immediate term, confederalism was to be the solution to some of the serious problems facing Flanders and Belgium.

Confederalism was first and foremost a tool, allowing Flanders to pursue its own socioeconomic policies and ensure that prosperity could be achieved. There was no

acknowledgement of value rational arguments in favour of Flemish self-government and the party seemed to attempt to distance itself from romantic concepts of nationalism. Confederalism was to be a first step in advancing these interests.

The European Union played a central role in this model, allowing for the Belgian state to be further hollowed, providing an intermediate step between independence. However, recent developments at the European level had to be addressed, and the party's historically positive support for integration was tempered, with a frame that equated the problems of Belgium and the problems of Europe.

Although the party stressed confederalism as a departure from previous piecemeal state reform processes, reversing the relationship between the centre and the regions, it also stressed this was an evolutionary process. Confederalism was therefore used as a symbol of moderation, a workable plan which could facilitate the N-VA's entry into government and kick-start reform.

7.3 Comparing independence and confederalism in 2014

Although labelled differently, confederalism and independence were functionally similar proposals in terms of competences and structures. The SNP called for international recognition and membership within international bodies, but also sought a high degree of integration with the United Kingdom and the European Union. While the N-VA did not seek legal recognition, it sought the ability to engage directly in some of these forums.

Table: Independence and Confederalism in 2014

Dimensions	*SNP*	*N-VA*
1. The meaning of self-government	*Independence as a tool*	*Confederalism as a tool*
2. Self-government, Europe and the world	*Integration, interdependence, and independence* *Scotland as a positive force in the world*	*Flanders as a European nation* *The interdependence of self-government* *The challenges for Europe and for Belgium*
3. Self-government and the state	*The British state as an outdated institution* *Divergence between Scotland and the UK* *Devolution as a journey with a final destination* *A renewed partnership*	*Belgium as an artificial state* *Belgian dysfunction* *State reform as too little, too late*
4. Self-government and the party system	*Doing Scotland down*	*The courage to govern* *Taking responsibility* *Flemish rivals as complicit*

The proposals put forward by the two parties reflected the art of the possible, a merger of the party's preferences for self-government and strategic considerations which took into account the international and European context, the structure of the Belgian and British states, and the party system in which the self-government goals were pursued. They also reflected what was considered politically achievable, with the N-VA stressing that while it was committed to independence within the European Union, the political will for it did not exist in Flanders.

Similarities can also be identified in the framing of these goals. These findings will be discussed in the analysis, which begins with a discussion of the purpose of self-

government, the primacy of self-government vis-à-vis other policy goals, and self-government and the three external contexts identified at the outset of this work.

Both parties framed self-government as a purposeful act rather than rooted entirely in the principle of self-determination – emphasising instrumental rational arguments rather than value rational concerns. For the SNP, independence was a tool – to improve Scotland's standing in the world, to better Scotland's economic performance and to end austerity policies. For the N-VA, confederalism was framed similarly, allowing for the pursuit of ideologically driven policies, including pursuing lower taxes, more social responsibility, and the end of transfers between Wallonia and Flanders. The details of these policies reflected the ideological positioning of each party but the purpose was similar..

Where we can see a degree of difference is the primacy of the self-government goal vis-à-vis other policy objectives. Both parties, like others within their party family, present comprehensive ideological programmes, to be pursued immediately as a party of government and in the event self-government was achieved. This conflict came to the fore for the N-VA, with internal conflict over whether confederalism or socioeconomic reforms were more pressing. This became more evident following the 2014 elections, in which the N-VA chose to place confederalism on the backburner until 2019. The coalition agreement emphasised institutional stability and promising further reform to come '*At the end of this legislature, as provided for by the electoral system and allowed by the constitution, it will be for the voters to decide between different political projects*' (BeGov, 2014). Following the failed referendum in Scotland, the SNP reaffirmed its commitment to independence, even in the uncertain scenario presented by the June 2016 Brexit vote.

Both parties proposed external self-government, although to different degrees of externality, with the SNP seeking a more traditional form of independence, although one well integrated within international structures while the N-VA's position was less clear. It sought a confederation in which the Belgian state would serve as a glove for Flanders and Wallonia, making no claims to international legal personality. Both acknowledge the constraints posed by an interdependent world and those constraints unique to small states but argue self-government is needed to allow Scotland and Flanders to play their rightful role. Self-government is framed as an opportunity for integration, not isolation, ending the unnatural separation imposed upon them by incorporation within the existing union.

Each also sees the European project as an umbrella under which ties between the embedding state and the self-governing nation could be maintained.

However, variation is evident in the salience and focus of the international dimension, with the SNP focusing on Scotland's role in the broader world and within the European Union, while the N-VA focuses exclusively on the European level. As a result of this, the salience accorded to the international, and more specifically European dimension, represented strategic considerations by each party. For the SNP, Europe was instrumentalised, with higher levels of support for European integration and higher European identities employed as a marker of difference between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. In contrast, this was less salient and therefore less instrumentalised in the case of the N-VA, operating in a context in which support for European integration were assumed. This has shifted since 2014 but the EU remains less politicised than in other member states.

Both parties respond to and elicit responses from their respective state contexts. Each has been critical of the state, arguing the structure and dynamics within the British and Belgian states necessitate and justify self-government as they fail to serve Scottish and Flemish interests. In doing so, they draw on social, economic, and democratic arguments, focusing on the failure to realise the policy preferences of Scots and Flemings. As a result of the historical failures of the state to adequately account for the need of the sub-state nations, both parties were sceptical of further reform falling short of their goals, seeing them as insufficient.

The SNP, despite its more radical self-government goal,proposed a significant degree of integration, proposing to maintain the social, currency, and monarchical unions and cooperate within the European Union, dissolving only the political union. Self-government, according to the party, was an opportunity to reset and renew relationships on more equal terms, a factor which did not emerge in the vision of the N-VA. The N-VA proposes the maintenance of a minimal Belgian state with international level personality but invests less attention to the maintenance or renewal of relationships, seeing self-government as an opportunity to separate. Implicit in this was a hope that the Belgian state structure would eventually become unnecessary, supplanted in its functions by the EU.

The party system and broader electoral context in which self-government was pursued very different in each case but ultimately, manifested in some important similarities and the way in which the campaigns were filtered through the lens of party politics was striking. For the SNP, the referendum was to be an extraordinary event, but one in which the party engaged with party allegiances and identities to justify self-government. The N-VA's pursuit of radical state reform was situated within the realm of normal politics, taking place, like previous rounds, through the negotiation of a governing coalition at the centre. The language used to characterise the parties themselves and their political rivals was broadly consistent with previous campaigns with the two parties stressing their legitimacy and courage, and critiquing the frailty and complicity of its political rivals.

In 2014 the SNP and N-VA pursued self-government – although different degrees of it – providing the opportunity to analyse proposals in detail and in light of their respective contexts, whether international, state, or party system. The interaction between the ideal of self-government and the context in which it was articulated is clear. Both are pursuing self-government from a strategic perspective, being shaped by conditions external to the party.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

The self-government goals advanced by the Scottish National Party, the Volksunie, and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie represent the '*art of the possible*', what was feasible and desirable given the environment in which the goals were formed. They took into account international and European dynamics, the nature of the embedding state and the prospect of accommodation within that structure, and the electoral and party system through which these goals might be achieved. The goals of each party were mapped and analysed over time, culminating in the analysis of the proposals for Scottish independence and the restructuring of the Belgian state along confederal lines in 2014.

Although 2014 did not see the dramatic constitutional changes that the Scottish National Party and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie had campaigned for, self-government remains on the agenda. Issues of self-government, self-determination, and sub-state nationalism are salient today, perhaps even more so at the time of writing than in 2014 when this research concludes. Although the form which Brexit will take remains to be decided, it is clear the SNP's proposal, with its emphasis on the European Union as an umbrella under which cooperation with the rest of the United Kingdom would take place, will require substantial revision. In 2014, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie chose to enter into government at the centre without an agreement on state reform, a clear departure from the principles it articulated in advance of the election. In doing so, the party effectively placed self-government on the backburner until 2019. It justified this decision with reference to functional concerns – the social and economic reforms which could be pursued in the absence of the Parti Socialiste in governing coalition. Beyond the scope of this study but salient to discussions of sub-state nationalism and self-government include recent events in Catalonia. The response of the European Union to demands for self-government and the constitutional structure and political response of the Spanish state, has shaped what forms of self-government are possible in the Catalan case.

Together, these events underline the importance of understanding the core questions set out in this research, both from the perspective of theory and practice. In this research, I sought to address several questions. I first asked what sub-state nationalist parties wanted – examining the labelling and definition of self-government over time in each of the three

parties. I then delved more deeply into the content of their goals, which were assumed to reflect strategic considerations, the understanding of a given party of the context in which it was expressed, and their historical positioning. Finally, I examined how variation in context might manifest in variation in the articulation of sub-state nationalist goals. I did not set out specific hypotheses in the course of this research, choosing instead to examine the dynamic interaction between the goals themselves and the context in which they were articulated.

In this concluding chapter, I will highlight primary findings as well as address alternative explanations, situate my work on self-government goals within the broader literature on sub-state nationalism, and discuss the strengths and limitations of the methods employed in this research. Finally, I will identify several avenues for future research. Before turning to this, however, I'll first outline the key contributions of this work which are threefold and related to the empirical data gathered and analysed for this research, the impact of its interpretation on the meanings of self-government, and the methodology employed during this research.

The empirical contribution was a product of the cases selected for inclusion and the timeframe studied. The cases selected for comparison in this research can be seen as an unusual pairing, but one which strengths the findings. In many ways, the Scottish National Party, the Volksunie, and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie are quite different parties – evident in their ideology, strategy, and goals as well as the states in which they mobilise. However, they each engaged, to varying degrees, with the world around them in articulating their goal, enabling comparison. The longitudinal approach allowed for me to capture internal consistency as well as change over time within and across parties in response to changes in the empirical contexts. The extension of the project to include the 2014 campaigns in Flanders and Scotland also facilitated the examination of comprehensive proposals for self-government at a single point in time.

This close study of a small number of cases allowed me to discuss the meaning of self-government, in a limited number of cases, but in a high level of detail. Building on this rich empirical dataset, conclusions could be drawn about the nature of self-government and the ways in which self-government goals are formed and expressed, which are detailed below. Particularly important was the model of value and instrumental rationality, inspired

by Varshney (2004) which allowed us to understand how parties framed their goals with regards to ideational principles rooted in the sense of nationhood and pragmatic concerns. It also allowed for the development of a model which takes into account multiple empirical contexts and dimensions which are often assessed in isolation in the existing literature.

This was carried out methodologically through an analysis of frames employed by each party. Framing analysis has not yet been fully utilised by political scientists and but represents an interesting tool for the analysis of party statements and discourse. The analysis of frames, both diagnostic and prognostic, rather than content or discourse more generally allowed me to focus on specific arguments in favour of self-government – asking and answering the question of how parties viewed empirical contexts vis-à-vis the issue of self-government. The focus on dimensions and frames within them, rather than specific frames, also enabled comparison across cases. While the analysis of frames for political discourse is relatively new, it seems to be a fruitful means of conducting qualitative research, although I will discuss some of the limitations below.

8.1 Key empirical findings

In this research, I was concerned with the nature of self-government as advanced by sub-state nationalist parties. At the outset, the ways in which parties spoke of their self-government goals, using terms like 'federalism', 'confederalism', and 'independence' with while rejecting academic or legalistic definitions suggested that these concepts were more complex than the literature would suggest. How did parties engage with the broader environment in which they operated? How did these contexts shape their self-government goals?

My goal was to go beyond a mechanistic analysis which would map empirical changes with changes in the self-government goal in an attempt to understand (a) the nature of self-government goals themselves; (b) how they represent rational considerations of opportunities and constraints, looking beyond explanations of whether things like state reform hinder or help the pursuit of self-government to how parties understand things external to themselves; and (c) what this says more generally about the nature of sub-state nationalist parties and self-government in the twenty-first century. Given the small number of cases and length of the time period under investigation, this research was not

designed to discover precise causal mechanisms but to explore the dynamic interaction between the empirical context and self-government goals themselves. It is also, of course, limited in the scope of its conclusions, given the small number of cases.

As each empirical chapter concludes with a comprehensive comparison and analysis of the three parties, this discussion will focus more broadly on the findings of this research as relevant to the meanings of self-government, the ways in which parties articulate their goals and what these suggest about and add to our understand of self-government, parties, and party goals.

1. Defining and labelling self-government and sub-state nationalist parties

Sub-state nationalist parties have been categorised, defined, and labelled on the basis of their self-government goals. Self-government, whether taking the form of accommodation within the existing state or exit from that state, is the raison d'être of sub-state nationalist parties and is expected to be a core message for the party. The analysis of each party's self-government goal – both in name and in form – brings up some interesting conclusions.

Firstly, we see significant variation in the ways in which party goals have been labelled and this is present in all three parties. Labelling appears to matter less, with variation in the language used over time. In all three cases, a tendency to reject academic or legalistic terms was present. Each employed modifiers, suggesting their policies were sui generis, reflecting the individual circumstances of their nation and territory. The SNP did this by referring to its self-government goals euphemistically as freedom or normal nationhood and more vaguely as self-government or home rule. At various points, the word independence disappeared from its manifestos. When it did appear, it often did so with a modifier, as '21st century' independence which suggested an acknowledgement that the nature of self-government had changed. Variation in labelling by the VU reflected changes to the content itself as the party radicalised but also represented a creative approach to academic terms with the party speaking of integral federalism and confederalism in quite unique ways. The N-VA's ultimate goal of independence is always presented in the context of European integration and it has argued that its vision of confederalism is something unique to the Flemish context, rejecting what it described as 'professorial' definitions.

Secondly, we can map moves on the spectrum of self-government, but not necessarily in the direction of continuous radicalisation which the existing literature may suggest. The Volksunie's self-government goals radicalised, beginning with federalism and moving towards a vaguely defined but externally oriented form of self-government. By its dissolution, it sought independence but always within the European Union. It was, throughout its history, strategically ambiguous, seemingly less concerned about the form self-government would take rather than the gains that could be realised as a result. In contrast, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie has moderated during its comparatively brief lifespan. However, this moderation was tempered by a rhetorical distinction between short-term and long-term goals as well as the emphasis on self-government as a means of pursuing policy goals suggesting an important strategic dimension. The SNP, in contrast to the Flemish parties, was more consistent, pursuing independence from its origins to the present day, although the party at times used vague or abstract language in place of the word independence, as discussed above. However, this consistency may obscure changes in the content of the goals themselves, with various relationships and supporting structures to be maintained.

These findings suggest the need to look beyond labels to the content and justification of goals. They also may suggest that parties are strategically ambiguous, emphasising or downplaying their goals to gain electoral support. The emphasis on defining parties by their self-government goals has hindered comparison of parties, both in different contexts and over time. (Fagerholm, 2016). The labels employed can obscure important similarities and differences. The parties studied here are largely at the more radical end of the spectrum, however, this research could be applied more broadly to the party family more generally. By artificially restricting our analysis to parties on one end of the spectrum or the other, we may inhibit useful comparison and draw an artificial distinction between parties.

2. Self-government for purpose and principle

The pursuit of self-government has at times been portrayed as principled, driven by a desire for a nation-state, regardless of practical concerns or material consequences. However, the literature has increasingly acknowledged that sub-state nationalist parties are rational actors. (Hechter, 2000: 3; Meadwell, 2005; Urwin, 1992). In this research, I've attempted to unpack the purpose of self-government through the employ of Varshney's

(2003) value and instrumental rationality. The construction of the arguments in favour of self-government are interesting in and of themselves but also because of their influence on the behaviour of parties in pursuit of their goals. All three parties employed value and instrumental frames but they are accorded various degrees of salience, both within cases over time and between cases. The SNP makes more value rational arguments, stressing the need of a nation to have a state but these are de-emphasised in the latter years of the party. This emphasis is likely to reflect its more radical self-government goal and Scotland's history of political independence which would be 'restored' in the event of independence from the United Kingdom. In contrast, the Volksunie's framing was more instrumental from its origins, stressing pragmatic considerations in the pursuit of federalism and later confederalism. Self-government would, in a value rational frame, allow for the self-actualisation of the Flemish community but largely would have material as well as social benefits. The Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie stressed this rationality to an even greater degree, focusing on the political and economic benefits of self-government and limiting and at points even denying value rational concerns. In 2014, the arguments made by the SNP and the N-VA were almost wholly focused on instrumental or material concerns – the ability of self-government to allow the respective nations to prosper culturally, politically, and economically.

The emphasis on instrumental concerns has important strategic and political implications. In all three cases, the purposes of self-government become more instrumental as the electoral success of the party increases and they are required to present their proposals to the voter. They therefore stress issues of concern to the voters – the ability of self-government to improve the economic performance, democratic representation, and social policy of a given nation. An emphasis on instrumental concerns also provides a party with greater flexibility when it comes to intermediate steps or the form that self-government can take. If the practical objectives of the party can be achieved within a different structure, they should do so. For the SNP, this translated into an ability to support devolution as consistent with the '*furtherance of Scottish interests*' while for the Volksunie, this led to support for more gradual reforms. In 2014, the N-VA used this as justification for entry into government in the absence of an agreement on state reform.

The analysis of a party's balance of value rational versus instrumental rational claims can contribute to our understanding of their behaviour and approach to government as well

as intermediate steps. A party for whom value rational framing dominated would likely be less open to compromise on goals or receptive to entry into government whilst one who stressed instrumental concerns might be accommodated with proposals falling short of their goals but which entailed material concessions or a significant degree of autonomy.

3. Context matters

In addition to positioning their self-government goals as having an ideational purpose, parties acknowledged a broad range of factors which shaped the form that self-government might take. Their understandings went beyond the ways in which international dynamics, European integration, and the state helped or hindered the cause of self-government to positioning self-government within these contexts, with the use of prognostic and diagnostic frames. International developments, European integration, state structures, and party competition were all used by the parties to justify self-government more generally but also to define the content of self-government goals. As the findings from each empirical context are presented in detail within each empirical chapter, I will focus here on my more general findings regarding the salience of issues.

Each party engaged deeply with the broader context in which it operates. This was evident in both the content of goals, which spoke to international dimension and state structure, its pursuit through electoral and party systems, and the framing of goals – with the three contexts motivating, enabling, or necessitating self-government. The importance of these contexts increased as goals of each party became increasingly comprehensive, largely as a result of party growth, increased research capacity, and the need to present a comprehensive programme to the voter. However, there is variation as to the degree each party engaged with the various contexts.

We see variation in the salience of the empirical context and this is particularly evident in the area of international and European integration. The SNP, with its goal of political independence, engaged intensively with both international and European issues from its origins to the present day while the two Flemish parties largely ignored the international dimension. The Volksunie, with its more moderate original goal of federalism, largely ignored issues of international politics, focusing on domestic concerns. However, since the 1970s, European integration has been more fundamental to the Flemish parties' vision of self-government while the SNP has engaged more selectively, and more critically.

The variation discussed here does point to one of the key limitations of this research, in that it does not directly take into account factors internal to the nation in attempting to explain a party's positioning. Issues of demography, geography, and public opinion should be accounted for in future research.

4. Sub-state nationalist parties as rational actors

Together, these findings support the larger argument that sub-state nationalist parties are rational actors and this rationality extends beyond their behaviour to the content of the goals themselves. The modification of the content and framing of self-government goals in response to opportunities and constraints presented by the system suggests a rationality that is underexplored in our analyses of sub-state nationalism thus far. Although an increasingly common assumption in the literature, this has been largely viewed through the lens of electoral politics, with a focus on how parties compete on secondary or ideological dimensions rather than how they modify their self-government goals or their framing of goals in light of these considerations (Lecours, 2012: 279; Alonso, 2012). We may conclude, with reference to these three cases, that sub-state nationalist parties are rational actors, but this rationality is bounded, they are not unconstrained actors employing Downsian strategies of vote maximisation. Limits to their rationality are found in self-government as a founding principle as well as a defining characteristic within the electoral marketplace, the preference of members and leaders who have a higher level of commitment to self-government, and the response of voters to what could be perceived as cynical electoral calculations. These considerations are similar to those faced by so-called mainstream parties, thus situating sub-state nationalist party politics within the realm of normal party politics.

The parties analysed here have found ways to operate within these constraints, modifying the nature, framing, and the timing of their goals to ensure electoral appeal and thus the survival of the party. This flexibility is evident within the approach of all three parties to intermediate steps or proposals made which fell short of their ultimate goals. Although all three faced internal debates about the wisdom of supporting proposals made by the state or statewide actors, all did so, justifying their actions as furthering the interests of their respective communities. These concessions or changes were to be stepping stones towards the ultimate goal of self-government. The N-VA does this even more explicitly,

arguing that it possesses a long-term goal of independence within Europe and a short-term goal of confederalism. This allows parties to position themselves as reasonable actors, willing to compromise in their pursuit of self-government.

It is this assumption of rationality and the strategic flexibility this provides which should underpin future research on sub-state nationalist parties. While their room for manoeuvre on their core dimension is more constrained than mainstream competitors, it does exist.

8.2 Sub-state nationalism and the nature of self-government

My interest in this subject represents a broader attempt to uncover something about the nature of self-government, statehood, and sovereignty. What do these concepts mean in the contemporary era? Are they of diminished relevance and value? The analysis of the self-government goals – their labelling, content, and framing – as expressed by sub-state nationalist parties allows us to address issues which are increasingly relevant but rarely questioned in the context of existing states and the parties and governments that operate within them. These actors each face constraints and struggle to negotiate their relationship in an increasingly interdependent world. It is just that sub-state nationalist parties are the ones forced to explicitly engage with these issues when setting out their self-government goals.

In seeking to understand self-government, I drew on a large and growing literature on sub-state nationalism but one which struggles to adequately capture and explore the '*thorny problem*' of party goals, particularly in reference to the broader context in which they are articulated (Schlesinger, 1975: 840). Research on how political parties form their platforms more generally has focused on the domains of electoral competition but has not always addressed how parties engage with the broader milieu. The Downsian assumption that party policies are motivated by the pursuit and maximisation of votes, and therefore office prevails.

Similar tendencies have been found on the literature on sub-state nationalist parties, which has focused on how parties define themselves vis-à-vis nationalist or statewide competitors. In chapter one, I identify several limitations of our understanding of self-government goals as present in the extant literature. These are related to the nature of parties themselves as well as their goals. In regards to the parties themselves, we tend to treat them as static actors and unitary actors. As it concerns their goals, the emphasis on

labelling presents problems for researchers, inhibiting cross-case comparison because of differences in labels as well as a suspicion, increasingly challenged, that all parties ultimately seek political independence. My work attempts, in these three cases, to address some of these challenges to better inform our understanding of sub-state nationalism and the objectives they hold.

By adopting a longitudinal approach which examines parties from their origins to dissolution or through 2014, I am able to pinpoint and analyse changes in the party's position as well as its framing. This allows how a party's current position may have its roots in earlier periods in the party history. It also allows us to capture more gradual changes – present in both the goals and context. This is evident in several key areas. The SNP's position on European integration has undergone only minor modification since its articulation of the independence in Europe platform in the 1980s but this represents a significant departure from what came before it and reflects both domestic and European developments. An analysis focusing on only the more recent period of the party's lifespan would overlook this. The Volksunie's position on Europe also shifted, with caution being replaced with a high level of enthusiasm for the European project and the development of a unique vision of European integration. Its framing of the nation and the Belgian state also became more radical as the party and Flanders grew in confidence.

Cross-case comparison is often made difficult by a focus on segmenting parties according to their self-government goals, treating parties which seek accommodation within the state as somehow fundamentally different than those who seek its exit as well as accepting labels at face value. While there is a legitimate basis in doing so, it does obscure some important commonalities and limits the scope of our research. The labels used by the parties over time, which include more ambiguous terms of self-government, autonomy, home rule, freedom and more legalistic terms of federalism, confederalism, and independence, should not be taken at face value. Labelling can obscure significant similarities and differences between the content of the goals themselves. Although the three parties explored here express different self-government goals, although ones clustered on the more radical end of the spectrum, they all engage with the broader context in which they operate. Parties which pursue more moderate goals of accommodation within the state may engage less intensively with the international context but those within EU member states are increasingly engaged with issues at this level. The

state remains an object of attention for parties at all levels. Sub-state nationalist parties can thus be compared more broadly.

There is also a tendency to treat all sub-state nationalist parties as seeking independence, whether overtly or covertly. This is despite the fact that independence demands are relatively rare, and success in achieving independence even less so. (Keating, 2001: 11). This research does not present a direct challenge to this if we take the VU and the N-VA as a single movement, there is a clear pattern of radicalisation towards an independence objective. However, both parties were quite flexible on the form that self-government might take, provided their other goals could be advanced. The analysis of the SNP does however suggest something important about independence goals which may be overlooked in the literature. The SNP acknowledges its goals do not involve independence without constraint, stressing interdependencies and integration, both at the international level and with the British state. It has, however, never renounced its independence objectives, despite a long period in which its pursuit and achievement seems impossible, suggesting that while it is a rational actor, its actions are constrained by its core ethos, its supporters, and its historical position.

In light of these findings, several broader conclusions can be drawn about the nature of sub-state nationalism and self-government. The first conclusion concerns the rationality of sub-state nationalist parties while the second concerns the nature of self-government in the twenty-first century.

Sub-state nationalist parties are defined by their pursuit of self-government. However, the parties studied here are not blindly pursuing a single objective, but multifaceted organisations pursuing self-government, what they view as the interest of the nation, and more traditional goals of votes, office, and policy. As a result, they behave as rational actors. Typically, discussions of the rationality or strategy of sub-state nationalist parties have focused on the secondary dimension of ideology (Detterbeck, 2012: 46). However, self-government goals are also subject to strategic calculation and this is demonstrated in changes in the goal itself, changes in the framing of the goal to boost support, and decisions to accept concessions which fall short. They also increasingly can enter into government. As a result, we can approach sub-state nationalist parties in many of the same ways we analyse more traditional parties, situating them within the domain of normal

politics whilst acknowledging that they face constraints that statewide parties, increasingly prone to catch-allism, may not.

Self-government is a nuanced concept and can take a multitude of forms and our study of it is further complicated by a mismatch of the language used by sub-state nationalist parties and academic researchers. However, several broad conclusions can be drawn about the nature of self-government from this research. Firstly, self-government is complex and parties themselves struggle to define the structures it may take. Secondly, the purpose of self-government goes beyond the idea that a nation must be accompanied by a state structure. When speaking to the voter, the parties studied here argued that self-government was necessary to pursue a broad array of public policy objectives. Finally, goals are made in acknowledgement of the increasing complexity and interdependence of the modern world. Integration within international structures as well as continued cooperation with the embedding states are present in proposals and considered consistent with self-government, even in its more radical form. Self-government is not diminished by this.

This understanding of self-government may also provide a lens through which to view statehood and sovereignty more generally. In setting out their self-government goals, sub-state nationalist parties are required to account for the international context and acknowledge some of the limitations of self-government. However, states face those same constraints and this may be worthy of further exploration.

8.3 Research limitations

While this research offers important insights on self-government, some significant limitations remain, a result of the necessary compromises of research design and case selection. Alternative explanations for party behaviour that were not explored in this research are likely to exist. The primary explanation is linked to one of the weaknesses identified in the literature above – the failure to account for internal dynamics in shaping a party's self-government goal.

This research was unable to capture and assess the internal dynamics within parties and the way this manifested in the party's self-government goals and their framing. As a result of my longitudinal approach and issues of access, discussion and analysis of internal party dynamics which may have impacted the framing and content of self-government goals.

We know from the empirical literature on the case studies that tensions existed within each party about the self-government goal itself and the means by which these goals were to be achieved. Individual leaders or factions within each party may have contributed to changes in the goals themselves or their framing, with the SNP's shift on European integration serving as one notable example. The dominant personality and intellectual leadership of Bart de Wever in the N-VA could also be explored as a potential explanation for the party's positioning. However, a decision was made to treat the party as a unitary actor, obscuring internal decision making processes and factionalism. This was a result of an interest in the self-government proposals made in a public forum and the challenge of identifying these internal dynamics over the extended time frame of this research. It would be difficult to accurately capture internal decision making processes at the origins of the SNP and the VU because of the duration of time that has passed.

There were additional factors internal to the state and nation which were not considered in detail over the course of this research. A broad interpretation of the 'art of the possible' may include characteristics of each nation – historical, economic, political, cultural, and geographic factors – which may influence the desirability and feasibility of various forms of self-government. The most salient of these is found in the two Flemish cases, described by one interviewee as the 'whale in the aquarium' or the salient explanation for the N-VA's strategic approach to self-government. This is Brussels – the Flemish capital, international centre, and Francophone city, situated within the territory of Flanders. The issue of Brussels has likely served as a moderator for self-government goals throughout the lifespan of both Flemish parties. The Flemish demographic majority also enhances the ability of Flemish nationalists to pursue accommodation within the state. In the Scottish case, a history of political independence which grants legitimacy to current calls as well as the historical position of the party makes moderation on the goal more difficult, although the party has gained flexibility with its support for further steps.

There also caveats about the generalisability of this research. Are other sub-state nationalist parties expected to engage in similar ways? Can we say something broader about the nature of sub-state nationalism and self-government as a result of this research? While the generalisability is limited by the focus on qualitative research methods and the limited number of cases, important takeaways remain. The three cases analysed were not selected as ideal types but are strong examples of sub-state nationalist parties which

articulate clear self-government goals. They demonstrated important similarities – having experienced success, both in electoral terms and in securing some form of self-government, albeit falling short of their ultimate goals. However, they differed in their goals and operated within very different contexts. Despite this, similarities in how they approached self-government, engaging with the '*art of the possible*' when articulating their goals. While we have seen that sub-state nationalist parties can differ on their approach to the international dimension, European integration, the state, and competition within a party system, they are all likely to engage to some degree with these issues. As a result, the model presented here could be applied to other cases and we would expect to see similar dynamics in other sub-state nationalist parties.

However, this may be restricted to a smaller segment of parties within the sub-state nationalist party family, more specifically those which compete for office regularly and have developed comprehensive policy platforms. These parties, unlike anti-system parties or those which operate on the fringes, will have engaged more explicitly in rational, pragmatic calculations about the feasibility and pursuit of self-government and tailored their framing of self-government to reflect opportunities and constraints inherent in the system.

8.4 The framing of self-government goals: methodological reflections

This research sought to capture the content of self-government goals and the ways in which these goals interacted with the contexts in which they were articulated. I did so through the analysis of frames – identifying the arguments made in support of self-government goals which referenced the empirical context which informed these goals. Framing is an underutilised but potentially promising tool for political scientists, allowing for the identification of arguments in a more systematic way than a more generalised content analysis. However, there are important limitations, both in the methodology more generally and specific to this research, which I will discuss below.

The analysis of frames allowed me to identify arguments in favour of self-government goals, both more fundamentally through value-oriented and instrumental frames, and with reference to the context in which they were articulated. The use of frames in support of self-governmental goals rather than of goals more generally enhanced the analytical depth

of the research – I was examining the goals themselves but also how they were expressed and justified. At the origins of this research, I suspected more variation in the goals of each party than was ultimately identified, it was in the arguments in favour of the goals where changes took place. The analysis of frames also allowed for comparison – both within a single case, as frames emerged and disappeared, and between cases, with the analysis of how an empirical context might be interpreted by different parties. The use of similar frames or the absence or presence of frames in one case and not another may suggest something about the party's interpretation of self-government.

However, there are several key concerns with the analysis of frames which must be considered and these regard the replicability, the identification of relationships, and the nature of the party as a frame-maker.

The identification, analysis and interpretation of frames are heavily reliant on the interpretation of the individual researcher. Frames which I identified over the course of this research may not be evident, or accorded the same significance, by another researcher using the same dataset. Frames are also plentiful and the selection of key frames may mean that important components are overlooked. This is partially remedied by the frequent referencing of data sources and extended quotations, allowing examiners and readers to evaluate my interpretation of these frames for themselves, but ultimately framing analysis, like other methods of qualitative analysis, does present challenges in terms of replicability and validity.

Another perhaps more fundamental concern speaks to the relationship between empirical contexts and changes therein and the frames employed by the party. My explicit assumption was that there was an interaction between the empirical contexts identified and the goals and frames employed by the party. While I did not set out hypotheses to be tested, this assumption underpinned my research. However, it was one that was difficult to examine directly, except in cases where parties directly cited a change in the context as responsible for the change in the frames employed, for example, increasing European integration as an enabler of self-government.

The analysis of frames tends, as I did in this research, to treat an organisation as a single coherent actor, overlooking variation or divisions within the parties themselves. All three parties have had experiences of factionalism, conflict, and differing viewpoints on both

goals and strategies and this research is unable to take into account these internal dynamics. Manifestos and public facing documents serve as evidence of the party's position but may disguise divisions within the party or represent the view of an influential leader. Changes in framing may in fact be a result in changes in the balance of power or leadership within the party rather than a direct response to the empirical contexts in which the party competes. I was also unable to capture the process of framing and counter-framing.

Despite these concerns, the analysis of frames allowed for the tracing and analysis of party goals over time and in interaction with the empirical context. An attempt to quantify these relationships would have reduced a rich dataset to an analysis of salience and ultimately failed to capture self-government goals in all their complexity.

8.5 Avenues for further research

The findings of this research suggests three key avenues for future empirical work which I hope to pursue in the coming years, as well as work on framing as a method for political scientists.

Firstly, the Scottish and Flemish cases remain relevant and worthy cases for further study, particularly in light of recent changes to the context in which their goals are situated. In the case of the SNP, the ongoing process of Brexit seems to present a paradox. It provides a justification for independence, given the divergence in voting between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, but also calls into question the viability of the pactist vision of independence presented by the party in 2014. The emphasis on continued partnership and the maintenance of many of the British institutions and unions under a European umbrella seen in 2014 is likely no longer viable. In Flanders too, the vision of self-government has undergone a shift. Although the N-VA agreed, upon entering into government, in 2014, to maintain a period of institutional stability, changes in the party's platform and strategy seem to be likely. As a party of government at the centre, harsh critiques of the Belgian state structure seem less likely. The party has also focused more critically on the process of European integration, particularly the EU's handling of the refugee crisis, calling into question the party's commitment to more integration and therefore, its long-term goal of political independence within a highly integrated European structure.

Secondly, the model developed here, with its emphasis on empirical contexts may be fruitfully applied to other sub-state nationalist parties, providing a template for the identification and analysis of self-government goals. As discussed in the theoretical framework, each of these contexts has been studied in isolation, but studying them together, we can better understand the nature of goals themselves and how this would be pursued. In a national context in which multiple parties are advancing different visions of self-government, this model would provide a useful mechanism for comparison. Upon reflection, this model would benefit from the inclusion of the broader socio-political context rather than its focus on the party system exclusively, allowing for the examination of public opinion and debates.

Finally, this model may be applied to broader constitutional debates within a single national setting, examining mechanisms of framing and counter-framing which were unable to be captured in the scope of this research. For example, a specific constitutional moment could be captured and analysed from multiple perspectives. We could return to the 2014 referendum and explore how both unionist and nationalist actors have engaged with these contexts in arguing their position.

Together, this work and further research, will deepen our understanding of self-government and its pursuit, a topic which continues to be relevant both in Western Europe, as events unfold in Catalonia, and further afield.

Appendix One: Codebook

Frames by chapter

Chapter 3: Self-government for purpose and principle

Value rationality and self-government	Messages which suggest that a nation and a state should be congruent and speaks of the importance of nationhood for the realisation of essential or existential goals. This can be understood with reference to MacCormick's (1970) concept of 'pure' nationalism. **A nation must have the state:** (SNP) Frame suggests that nation and statehood must be congruent, that this is the natural order. **Self-actualisation:** (SNP / VU) Frame suggests that self-government would allow the nation to realise its full potential or self-actualisation. **The nation as a building block:** (N-VA) Frame suggests the nation as a natural unit and one necessary to build a society which is cohesive. There is some overlap with instrumental rationality here.
Instrumental rationality and self-government	This can be understood with reference to MacCormick's (1970) utilitarian nationalism, or self-government and nationalism as a rational act, designed to serve as a means to pursue specific policy goals. **Self-government as a means:** (SNP, VU, N-VA) Frame emphasises that self-government is a means of pursuing specific policy goals, acting in the interest of the nation. Variation in the policies which would be pursued but similar frames employed by all three parties.

Chapter 4: Self-government, Europe, and the World

Self-government in the world	Statements which engage with the intersection of self-government and the world, or the international dimension of self-government. This dimension captures ideas of sovereignty, legal understandings of self-government, and the nation and the broader world. **Changing conceptions of sovereignty**: (SNP) Frame suggests that the nature of sovereignty has changed, often used to justify self-government more generally but also the

	content of self-government goals with constitutional structures reflecting changing nature of statehood.
	Integration not isolation: (SNP / VU) Frame challenges narrative that sub-state nationalist parties seek to isolate themselves, arguing instead that self-government allows for integration into the broader world rather than the isolation forced upon them by integration within the embedding state. No longer working through intermediary of the state.
	Normal nationhood: (SNP) Frame argues that self-government is the 'normal' state of affairs and the status quo is abnormal. Scotland would not be exceptional but would instead take its normal and natural place in the world.
	Sovereignty as an outdated concept: (N-VA) Frame challenges the concept of sovereignty in an interconnected and interdependent world, arguing that sovereignty is outdated. Allows for more flexibility in the form self-government may take.
Self-government and European integration	This dimension includes discourse which engages with the idea of self-government and European integration, including frames in favour of against, or reflecting the party's interpretation of the opportunities and costs of integration.
	The European threat: (SNP) European integration represents a specific threat, whether cultural, political, or economic, to the existence and prosperity of the given nation.
	Opposition as contingent: (SNP) Frame suggests that while the party is opposed to European integration, this opposition is contingent on domestic and international developments which might allow for a more favourable position. Seen in statements of 'no voice, no entry'
	Pragmatic support: (SNP) Frame suggests that the European Union is a means which would facilitate or enable self-government, a pragmatic rather than ideational approach to European integration.
	Federalisation before Europeanisation: (VU) The reform of the state must precede European integration,

	allowing for the constituent units of the Belgian state to be properly represented at the European level. **A distinctive vision of Europe:** (VU) This descriptive frame suggests that the Volksunie offers a distinct vision of European integration, one which will facilitate and support Flemish self-government. **Europe as an enabler:** (N-VA) Frame takes the form of an argument that Europe will facilitate or enable self-government, reducing some of the costs and the need for a Belgian state structure to act as an intermediary force. Similar to the SNP's frame of pragmatic support. **Critical and constructive:** (N-VA) Frame defines the party's support for European integration as both critical of developments but offering a constructive proposal rather than rejecting Europe outright. **The problems of Europe, the problems of Belgium:** (N-VA) Frame equates the problems of Europe (a productive North, a dependent South, mismanagement and bureaucracy) with those of Belgium, suggesting that the EU can be understood as Belgium writ large.
International and European identities	This engagement with identity did not come through to any significant degree in the discourse of the Volksunie and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie but was present in the SNP's discourse, largely as a marker of difference **Global Scots v Little Englanders:** Frame which suggests that Scots are by their nature more globally oriented, in contrast to the English which are more isolationist and less in favour of integration.

Chapter 5: The state and existing state structures

The state and existing state structures	This dimension examines ways in which existing state structures or the union are employed to justify self-government.

Hostile: (SNP / VU) Frame portrays the central state as overtly hostile to the nation, whether this takes the form of political or cultural oppression or economic exploitation. This frame often employs language identified by Hechter (1977) as internal colonialism.

Neglectful: (SNP) Frame describes the central state as neglectful, whether by virtue of its structure or by its purposeful disregard of the nation. In this frame, it is argued that Scottish needs cannot be met by the centre, calling into the question the utility of the state.

Of diminishing value: (VU) This frame suggests that the Belgian state is increasingly irrelevant in the light of broader European integration and the development of Flanders as an actor with a greater degree of power and prosperity.

Artificial: (N-VA) This frame portrays Belgium as artificial, characterised as a historical accident rather than as a genuine nation and is therefore destined for failure. Often this frame is bolstered by references to the lack of common language or demos.

Inefficient and irrelevant: (N-VA) Similar to the VU's frame which suggests that the Belgian state is of diminishing value, the N-VA describes Belgium as inefficient and increasingly irrelevant in the lives of Flemings.

Proposed and realised state reform

This dimension captures the parties' responses to proposed and realised state reform, identifying the party's position on whether intermediate steps falling short of its ultimate goal should be rejected or embraced.

A dangerous distraction: (SNP) This frame embodies fundamentalist approaches to self-government, rejecting intermediate steps in the form of decentralization or devolution as structures which would undercut the Scottish bid for independence.

A first step toward self-government: (SNP) In contrast to the preceding frame, this frame represents a gradualist view, which suggests that devolution could be seen as a first step toward independence or a platform on which an independence bid could be launched.

Insufficient but workable: (SNP) This frame suggests that while the realized devolution settlement was

insufficient, it was ultimately workable, a pragmatic approach adopted by the SNP with devolution.

Insufficient: (VU) This frame involves the dismissal of alternative proposals, made by other parties and at the centre, as insufficient, unable to address the concerns of the Scottish nations.

An incremental process: (VU) This frame describes the process of self-government as an incremental one, requiring a gradual or stepping stone approach. Each reform builds on the last. This can be used to justify acceptance of more moderate steps.

Inevitable: (VU) Closely linked to the preceding frame, this frame argues that a centrifugal process has been set in motion by the VU and that self-government is inevitable, even if it takes time. This frame can be used to justify participation in intermediate steps.

The futility of further reforms: (VU) A more radical frame which suggests that the nature of reform is insufficient to meet the needs of Flanders and more radical action is required.

Self-government and relations with the state

This final dimension examines the relationship with the state that the parties seek for their nation once their ideal form of self-government is achieved, drawing on ideas of pactists or principled independentist goals presented by Lluch.

A partnership of equals: (SNP) This frame embodies a pactists understanding of self-government, allowing Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom to reconcile and cooperate on a basis of equality rather than the current unequal relations.

Good neighbours: (VU) Similar to the partnership of equals frame employed by the SNP, this frame suggests that Flanders and Wallonia could live as good neighbours, cooperating when it suited them.

A letterbox for Flanders and Wallonia: (N-VA) This descriptive frame sets out the party's view of the central state, serving not as a meeting point or as a forum for cooperation, but as a letterbox.

Gradually disappearing: (N-VA) A frame which suggests that the Belgian state is transient, a temporary structure which will gradually disappear over time. This frame implies

	that the rupture of the Belgian state will be gradual rather than abrupt.

Chapter 6: Self-government and the party system

The party and its rivals	This dimension explores how sub-state nationalist political position themselves as credible agents of self-government and question the ability of their political rivals to adequately do so.
	Scotland's Party, Scotland's voice: (SNP) This frame positioned the SNP as the party which represented Scotland's interests and was able to speak up for Scotland.
	The illegitimacy of political rivals: (SNP) Closely linked with the preceding frame, this frame suggested that political rivals were illegitimate in their claims to represent Scottish interests at the centre.
	A voice for Flanders and self-government: (VU) Similar to frame employed by the SNP, the Volksunie used this frame to position itself as the party speaking for Flanders and for self-government, in contrast with its statewide rivals.
	A moral leader: (N-VA) The N-VA employed this frame to suggest a principled stance, both in how the party comported itself and to participation in government. It suggested that it was driven by principles rather than a desire for power.
	The complicity of traditional rivals: (N-VA) In contrast to the preceding frame, this frame argued that traditional Flemish rivals were complicit in the Belgian system and this frame takes the form of accusations of Belgicisme and of an interest in power rather than the cause of Flemish self-government.
	The futility of the VB: (N-VA) The Vlaams Belang were framed by the N-VA as representing a futile cause, with no hopes of entering into government and pursuing their self-government goals.
The party and its pursuit of self-government	This dimension addresses how the party views itself as an agent of self-government within the party system. It draws

	on Sartorian concepts of blackmail and coalition relevance as well as approaches to participation.
	A party of action: (SNP) This frame detailed how the party would use its votes, office, and policy to pursue its self-government goal. Included within this frame are discussions of how a majority of seats at Westminster would be seen as a mandate for independence.
	A party of blackmail: (SNP / VU) This frame draws on Sartorian understandings of party relevance, with the party portraying itself as an influential actor from outside of government, holding the government to account and wielding its votes and seats to extract concessions.
	A party of government: (SNP) This post-devolutionary frame situated the party as a party of government, effectively separating its independence objectives from its role in government at the devolved level.
	A party of principled participation: (VU) This frame was used to justify the participation of the Volksunie in government, drawing a distinction between the party and the Vlaams Blok. Using this frame, the party argued it would participate even at cost to itself.
	The courage to abstain: (N-VA) In contrast to the frame of principled participation employed by the VU, the N-VA employed a frame of abstention, arguing that it would abstain in order to pursue true state reform rather than being coopted into the Belgian system. Frame is closely linked with the party's portrayal of itself as a moral leader.

Chapter 7: Self-government in 2014

The meaning of self-government:	This dimension examines the meaning of self-government and the purposes of self-government in the 2014 campaigns.
	Self-government as a tool: (SNP / N-VA) Frame suggests that self-government is a tool, allowing for the pursuit of specific policy goals, whether social or economic.

Self-government, Europe, and the world	This dimension addresses how self-government is framed in relationship to Europe, the European Union and the broader world in the context of the 2014 debate.
	Integration, interdependence, and independence: (SNP) This frame argues that independence is closely linked with integration (with the United Kingdom, with Europe, and with the world) and suggests that the party's proposals are cognisant of the interdependences present in the existing system.
	Scotland as a positive force in the world: (SNP) This frame suggests that an independent Scotland would play a positive role in the broader role, and this frame is implicitly and explicitly contrasted with the UK's role.
	Flanders as a European nation: (N-VA) This identity frame situates Flanders as a European nation and Flemings as possessing a Flemish as well as European identity. It is often used to contrast democratic Flemish nationalist voices with more radical Flemish rivals.
	The interdependence of self-government: (N-VA) This frame implies that self-government in the contemporary era is by nature interdependent. It suggests that the structures of self-government are less important than their practice.
	The challenges for Europe and for Belgium: (N-VA) This frame suggests that both Europe and Belgium face similar challenges, in the form of geographical economic disparities.
Self-government and the state	This dimension explores the ways in which self-government goals are framed vis-à-vis the embedding state, both in the form of the state as a justification for self-government and the potential for partnership in the event that the party's self-government goals are achieved.
	The British state as an outdated institution: (SNP) This frame suggests that the British state is no longer fit for purse, failing to serve the needs of its constituents.
	Divergence between Scotland and the UK: (SNP) This frame identifies different preferences and behaviours and these differences are used to necessitate self-government.
	Devolution as a journey: (SNP) This frame situates devolution as part of a journey towards self-government or

	independence, and is found in language of stepping stones or stations en route to an ultimate destination.
	A renewed partnership: (SNP) This frame embodies a pactists understanding of self-government, allowing Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom to reconcile and cooperate on a basis of equality rather than the current unequal relations.
	Belgium as an artificial state: (N-VA) Frame suggests Belgium is artificial, lacking a demos, a historical accident rather than possessing the essence of nationhood required for cohesion and effective government.
	Belgian dysfunction: (N-VA) This frame cites Belgian dysfunction as an incentive for self-government, characterizing the Belgian system as flawed and inefficient.
	State reform as too little, too late: (N-VA) Proposals for further reforms are critiqued as insufficient and unable to address the fundamental flaws of the Belgian state in this frame.
Self-government and the party	This dimension was explored how the parties positioned themselves and their political rivals in the context of the party system.
	Doing Scotland down: (SNP) This frame serves as a critique of Unionist rivals, who are accused of lacking faith or confidence in Scotland's ability to govern itself, ie 'too wee, too poor…'
	The courage to govern: (N-VA) This frame is contrasted with previous frames adopted by the N-VA focused on its policy of principled abstention. Instead, in 2014, the party positions itself as willing to participate in government, even if it comes at a cost.
	Taking responsibility: (N-VA) This frame focuses on the party itself and is closely linked with the preceding frame. In it, the party argues that it will take responsibility for its own actions and participate at the centre.
	Flemish rivals as complicit: (N-VA) This frame suggests that Flemish rivals are corrupted or complicit in the Belgian system, more interested in accruing power at the central level than representing the needs and interests of Flanders.

Appendix Two: List of interviewees

Interviews were conducted over the course of this research in Flanders and Scotland and encompassed members of the Scottish National Party, Volksunie, and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie. Fieldwork was conducted in February 2014 in Flanders and spring and summer 2014 in Scotland. Several respondents asked to remain anonymous in the publication and are noted as such.

Anonymous, former leader of the Volksunie, interview conducted in Antwerp, Belgium, February 2014.

Anonymous, former leader of the Volksunie, interview conducted in Leuven, Belgium, February 2014.

Bracke, Siegfried, MP, interview conducted in Brussels, February 2014.

Crawford, Bruce, MSP, interview conducted in Edinburgh, Scotland, June 2014.

Fabiana, Linda, MSP, interview conducted in Edinburgh, Scotland, May 2014.

Jambon, Jan, MP, interview conducted in Brussels, February 2014.

Macaskill, Kenny, MSP, interview conducted in Edinburgh, Scotland, May 2014.

Pohlmann, Joachim, N-VA spokesman, interview conducted in Brussels, February 2014.

Watt, Maureen, MSP, interview conducted in Edinburgh, Scotland, June 2014.

Weyts, Ben, President of the N-VA, interview conducted in Brussels, February 2014.

Wilson, Andrew, former MSP, interview conducted in Edinburgh, Scotland, June 2014.

Wilson, Gordon, former leader of the SNP, interview conducted in Broughty Ferry, June 2014.

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